NATION

US soil being used for terrorist activities against India, FBI told

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BUSINESS

Fitch raises India's GDP forecast for next fiscal to 7%

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SPORTS

Mumbai win record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title

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K'taka okays Phase-3 of Metro covering ORR

Phase-3 will cover 44.65 km and operate by 2028

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

The Karnataka Cabinet on Thursday gave its approval to begin construction of the infrastructure required for Phase-3 of the Metro Rail transport system in Bengaluru.

Phase-3, which would cover a distance of 44.65 km, will be completed at an estimated cost of Rs 15,611 crore and is intended to be completed by 2028. Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda said the project will cover the entire Outer Ring Road.

The first Metro rail line will be built from Hebbal to JP Nagar, covering a distance of 32.15 km. The second line will pass through Gorguntepalya, Magadi Road, Mysuru Road and touch JP Nagar. Phase-3 includes Hosahalli in Vijayanagar, from Hosahalli to Magadi Road up to Kadabagere, covering a distance of approximately 12.5 km.

The first Metro rail line will be built from Hebbal *PHOTO: PTI*

"It will pass from JP Nagar to Silk Board, Silk Board to KR Puram, and from KR Puram to Hebbal. It will continue from Hebbal and will cross Tumakuru Road from near Dr Rajkumar's memorial and will cross Magadi Road, Mysuru Road, Kanakapura Road and join JP Nagar. It will cover the entire Outer Ring Road," Gowda told reporters here. "The BMRCL has said in its note that it can finish (Phase-3) by 2028. The state government will

Meanwhile Karnataka cabinet decided that it will require the Palace Grounds land for road widening purposes, ahead of a contempt case regarding the matter coming up for hearing in the Supreme Court.

The cabinet also decided to give Transferable Development Rights (TDR) against the acquisition of land, Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told reporters.

Reportedly, the apex court has sought the personal presence of Chief Secretary and Additional Chief Secretary in the Urban Development Department and the Commissioner of the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP), the urban local body governing Bengaluru.

He said that in 2006, Karnataka had decided to acquire 15.5 acres of Palace Grounds near Mekhri Circle for road widening. Accordingly a compound wall was built inside the Palace Grounds, but previous BJP government decided that it did not require it.

The Mysuru Royal family approached Supreme Court against the government decision saying that in 2006-07 the compound wall was built inside the palace grounds for acquisition of land, but now they do not need it for road widening. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

Russia polls today: What next reign of Putin could mean

TALLINN, 14 MARCH

As Vladimir Putin heads for another six-year term as Russia's president, there's little electoral drama in the race. What he does after he crosses the finish line is what's drawing attention and provoking anxiety. The voting that concludes on Sunday is all but certain to allow Putin to remain in office until 2030, giving him a full three decades of leading Russia as either President or Prime Minister. The heft of that long tenure and the thorough suppression of Opposition voices gives Putin a very strong — and perhaps unrestrained — hand. *—AP*

>>>More on Page 6

Petrol, diesel prices cut by ₹2 per litre

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Petrol and diesel prices were cut by Rs 2 per litre each as state-owned oil companies ended a nearly two-year-long hiatus in rate revision, just hours before the general election schedule is announced. The revised price will be applicable from 6 am today the oil ministry said on Thursday evening. Petrol in the national capital will now cost Rs 94.72 a litre compared to Rs 96.72 per litre currently while diesel prices will be Rs 87.62 against Rs 89.62 at present. The price cut came a week after a Rs 100 per cylinder reduction in cooking gas LPG price was announced. *—PTI*

Bhutanese PM begins India visit, meets Modi

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Bhutanese Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay on Thursday began a five-day visit to India, his first foreign trip after assuming the charge of the top office in January. Prime Minister Narendra Modi will hold talks with Tobgay with an aim to further bolster the ties.Union Cabinet on Wednesday approved the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the nations on extending co-operation in the field of energy efficiency. It also cleared the an agreement between Bhutan Food and Drug Authority and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India for cooperation in the area of food safety. *—PTI*

1 NATION, 1 POLL

Kovind panel wants joint elections across 3 tiers

A step towards 1 nation, 1 election

- Here is what Kovind-led panel suggested in the 18,626 page report
- Simultaneous polls to Lok Sabha and Assemblies can be held as the first step
- Followed by local body polls within 100 days as the second step
- Tenure of all state Assemblies should end with Lok Sabha elections
- In case of hung House and no-confidence motion, fresh polls can be held for remainder of 5-year term
- Amending Article 325 to enable the creation of a single electoral roll. According to Article 325, no one can be prevented from being included in electoral roll based on their religion, race, caste, or sex.
- ECI must plan ahead for logistical arrangements and equipment procurement, including EVMs and VVPATs.

Ram Nath Kovind, presents 'One Nation, One Election' report to President Droupadi Murmu, in New Delhi *PHOTO: PTI*

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The Ram Nath Kovind-led panel on 'One Nation One Election' has recommended a single electoral roll and electoral Photo Identity Cards (EPIC) for use in elections to all three tiers of the government.

In its report submitted to President Draupadi Murmu on Thursday, the committee recommended a two-step approach for holding simultaneous elections for Lok Sabha, state assemblies and local bodies.

In the first step simultaneous elections can be held for Lok Sabha and state Legislative Assemblies, it said. This can be followed in the second step with holding elections to municipalities and panchayats withn 100 days. It recommended fresh elections could be held to constitute a new Lok Sabha in the event of a hung House or a no-confidence motion.

When fresh elections are held for state legislative assemblies, such new assemblies -- unless sooner dissolved -- shall continue up to the end of the full term of the Lok Sabha.

To bring into force such a mechanism, Article 83 (duration of Houses of Parliament) and Article 172 (duration of state legislatures) need to be amended.

Over 21,558 responses were received from citizens from all over India and 80 per cent of the respondents supported simultaneous elections. *—ANI*

Members of the panel

- Ram Nath Kovind, former president
- Amit Shah, Home Minister
- Ghulam Nabi Azad, Opposition leader
- NK Singh, former chairman of 15th Finance Commission
- Subhash C Kashyap, former Lok Sabha secretary general
- Harish Salve, Senior advocate,
- Sanjay Kothari, former chief vigilance commissioner

EC RELEASES DATA

Once raided, Future Gaming, MEIL top electoral bond list

NEW DELHI, 11 MARCH

From steel tycoon Lakshmi Mittal to billionaire Sunil Bharti Mittal's Airtel, Anil Agarwal's Vedanta, ITC, Mahindra and Mahindra, and a lesser-known Future Gaming and Hotel Services were among the prominent buyers of the now-scrapped electoral bonds for making political donations.

The Election Commission put up on its website the data on electoral bonds on Thursday, a day ahead of the Supreme Court-fixed deadline.

Future Gaming, which was probed by the Enforcement Directorate in March 2022, bought electoral bonds worth over Rs 1,350 crore under two different sets of companies. Among the known corporates, Agarwal's Vedanta Ltd bought Rs 398 crore worth of bonds, while Sunil Mittal's three companies together purchased a total of Rs 246 crore worth of bonds.

Steel magnate Lakshmi Niwas Mittal bought Rs 35 crore worth of bonds in his individual capacity. Hyderabad-based Megha Engineering, which has bagged contracts of several large infrastructure projects, bought bonds worth Rs 966 crore.

Future Gaming, which was probed by ED in March 2022, bought electoral bonds worth over Rs 1,350 crore *PHOTO: PTI*

Bonds not enchased by parties transferred to PM's funds

State Bank of India (SBI) on Thursday revealed that unredeemed electoral bonds by political parties were transferred to the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund (PMNRF), the Wire reported. PMNRF website states that it only accepts voluntary donations by individuals and institutions. *—Salar News*

While most of the bonds have been issued in the name of political parties, the donations made to the Congress and the Samajwadi Party were made in the name of 'President, All India Congress Committee' and 'Adyaksha Samajvadi Party'. website.

In an affidavit filed before the Supreme Court, the State Bank of India (SBI) said a total of 22,217 electoral bonds of varying denominations were purchased by donors between 1 April, 2019 and 15 February this year, out of which 22,030 were redeemed by political parties. *—PTI*

UZBEK WOMAN FOUND DEAD IN B'LURU HOTEL

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

A 37-year-old woman from Uzbekistan, identified as Zareena, was found dead in her hotel room on Wednesday. 8 March. Zareena had arrived in Bengaluru four days prior to her death on a tourist visa. She was staying at the Jagadish Hotel in the Seshadripuram area.

According to police reports, the room was booked under the name of one Rahul Kumar, till 16 March. The hotel staff received a call from one of Zareena's friends at 10.30 pm on Wednesday after failing to contact her. Upon receiving no response from the room after repeated knocking, the hotel staff used a master key to enter the room. Zareena's body was found on the floor with facial injuries.

Seshadripuram Police Station authority told Salar News "The hotel manager, Gaurav Kumar Singh, immediately filed a police complaint after discovering the Zareena. The victim's body was sent to Bowring Hospital for post-mortem. Our speculations are that she was probably smothered to death."A Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) team along with a canine squad are meticulously examining the room for evidence. *—Salar News*

Gyanesh Kumar, Sukhbir Sandhu appointed ECs

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Former bureaucrats Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Gyanesh Kumar were on Thursday appointed as the new election commissioners.

They were named by a panel chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, committee member and Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said on Thursday.

Adhir dissented on the names put up by the government for the position of Election Commissioner. Two positions in the commission were vacant following the recent resignation of EC Arun Goel.

After the meeting of the selection committee, Adhir alleged that the procedure followed for selection of t Election Commissioners has some lacunae.

"They (government) have the majority (in the committee that appoints election commissioner). Earlier, they had given me 212 names, but 10 minutes before the appointment they again gave me just six names. I know that the CJI isn't there, government has made such a law that the CJI doesn't interfere and the Cente can choose a favourable name," Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said.

The two will join Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar on the commission.

Gyanesh retired as secretary of the cooperation ministry in February, while Sandhu, was former Chief Secretary, Government of Uttarakhand. *—ANI*

PHOTO: PTI

FARMERS ENTER DELHI FOR 'MAHAPANCHAYAT'

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Thousands of farmers on Thursday participated in the "Kisan Mazdoor Mahapanchayat" at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan where a resolution was passed to intensify the protest against the Centre's policies regarding the farming sector and to continue the stir during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls.

This was perhaps the biggest gathering of farmers in the national capital after their agitation at Delhi's borders ended in 2021 following the repeal of the three contentious farm laws by the Centre.

It also vowed to continue its stir during the upcoming Lok Sabha polls if its demands are not met, according to the resolution. Bharatiya Kisan Union leader Rakesh Tikaitsaid the government wants to destroy the country by turning the farmers into labourers. "They have already ended the 'mandi' system in Bihar and now they want to do it across the country. This way, they want the farmers to become labourers," he said. "We have been holding agitations since 2021 and nothing has happened," he said. Haryana has moved Supreme Court challenging Punjab and Haryana High Court order setting up a panel to probe farmer Shubhkaran Singh's death during a clash between farmers and the security personnel. *—PTI*

India ranks 108 of 193 in gender inequality

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

India stands at rank 108 out of 193 countries, with a score of 0.437, according to the Gender Inequality Index (GII) 2022 released by the United Nations Development Programme.

The Gender Inequality Index 2022 was released on Wednesday, by UNDP in their Human Development Report 2023-2024. India stood at rank 122 out of 191 countries with a score of 0.490 in the GII 2021. This shows a significant jump of 14 ranks on GII 2022 vis-a-vis GII 2021.

"This is an outcome of the decisive agenda set by the government for ensuring women's empowerment through policy initiatives aimed at their long-term socio-economic and political development. Government initiatives have spanned across women's lifecycles including large scale initiatives for girls' education, skill development, entrepreneurship facilitation and safety in the workplace." Ministry of Women and Child Development release said.

Policies and legislation in these areas have been driving the Government's 'women-led development' agenda. GII reflects gender-based disadvantage in three dimensions--reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market--for as many countries as data of reasonable quality allow. *—ANI*

NO 'OBSCENE' CONTENT

I&B Ministry blocks 18 OTT platforms

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

- 19 websites, 10 apps and 57 social media accounts associated with these platforms have been disabled for public access in India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said on Thursday

Information & Broad casting (I&B) Ministry has taken action, in coordination with various intermediaries, to block 18 OTT platforms publishing "obscene," "vulgar," and, in some instances, "pornographic content".

Nineteen websites, 10 apps (seven on the Google Play Store and three on the Apple App Store), and 57 social media accounts associated with these platforms have been disabled for public access in India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting said on Thursday. Information & Broadcasting Minister Anurag Singh Thakur has repeatedly emphasised the responsibility of the platforms to not propagate obscenity, vulgarity and abuse under the guise of 'creative expression'. On 12 March, Thakur announced that 18 OTT platforms publishing obscene and vulgar content had been taken down, the release said.

The statement further added that the recent decision was taken under the provisions of the Information Technology Act, 2000, in consultation with other ministries of the Centre, and domain experts specializing in media and entertainment, women's rights, and child rights.

"A significant portion of the content hosted on these platforms depicted nudity and sexual acts in inappropriate contexts, such as relationships between teachers and students, incestuous family relationships, etc. The content included sexual innuendos and, in some instances, prolonged segments of pornographic and sexually explicit scenes devoid of any thematic or societal relevance," the statement added.

One of the OTT apps amassed more than 1 crore downloads, while two others had over 50 lakh downloads on the Google Play Store. Additionally, these OTT platforms extensively utilise social media to disseminate trailers, specific scenes, and external links aimed at attracting audiences to their websites and apps. The social media accounts of the concerned OTT platforms had a cumulative followership of over 32 lakh users, it said. *—PTI*

CRIME BEAT

2 injured after 'robbers' open fire at jewellery shop

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

At least two people were injured after four bike-borne miscreants opened fire at a jewellery shop in Bengaluru's Devinagar in an attempt to rob it. According to the police, the miscreants arrived at Lakshmi Jewellers around 11 am. When the owner of the jewellery store Appuram resisted giving the jewellery, the miscreants opened fire three times, leaving him and a staff member Abhiram injured. One was shot in the leg and the other was shot in the abdomen. The accused initially threatened the staff to give away gold ornaments. When the staff resisted, they opened fire and fled from the spot. Both injured individuals were rushed to MS Ramaiah Hospital for treatment. There were no reports of any stolen valuables from the shop. While the motive remains unclear, the police suspect that the assailants might have intended to kill him the owner in addition to the robbery attempt. This is due to the limited time spent inside the shop and the retrieved pistol left at the scene. PTI CCTV footage from the surrounding area is being reviewed to identify and apprehend the perpetrators. Director General of Police (DGP) Alok Mohan and Bengaluru Police Commissioner B Dayananda visited the spot.

—Salar News

Discontent brews in BJP after first LS polls list

Eshwarappa blames BSY for son being denied ticket

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

A day after BJP announced its first list of candidates for 20 Lok Sabha constituencies for Parliament elections, discontent has started brewing among the ticket aspirants who were denied a ticket.

Former chief minister Jagadish Shettar, who was expecting a ticket from Haveri or Dharwad Lok Sabha constituency, said he will arrive at a decision on Thursday.

According to him, he is still in talks with the seniors in BJP regarding the Belagavi seat.

Shettar had returned to BJP in January after quitting Congress, which gave him a ticket for the 2023 Assembly polls.

Though he had lost that election, Congress nominated him as a Member of the Legislative Council.

Incidentally Shettar had quit BJP before the elections as he had been denied a ticket.

Shettar's supporters claim that he was offered a Lok Sabha ticket in the 2024 elections by BJP.

Shettar denied being made a scapegoat by BJP,

Reacting to it, Union Minister for Coal and Mines, Pralhad Joshi said, "Shettar has said that his name is there for Belagavi constituency. I too know this. I will be happy if he gets the ticket from Belagavi or any other place because he is our very senior leader."

Another BJP leader left disappointed after the first list was former Deputy Chief Minister KS Eshwarappa. He was aspiring for a ticket for his son KE Kantesh.

Former chief minister Jagadish Shettar, who was expecting a ticket said he will arrive at a decision on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Eshwarappa accused the former chief minister BS Yediyurappa, who is in the BJP's apex body parliamentary board member, of chucking out his son from the Lok Sabha election.

"There is a pressure on me to contest the election independently," Eshwarappa told reporters in Shivamogga, yesterday. He alleged that Yediyurappa had assured ticket to his son and also promised to campaign for his victory but "cheated him." BJP on Wednesday named former chief minister Basavaraj Bommai for the Haveri seat.

Sitting BJP MP and former chief minister DV Sadananda Gowda, who has been denied a ticket from Bengaluru North constituency, on Thursday called on Eshwarappa.

"He is deeply pained. I got to know that he is convening a meeting tomorrow in Shivamogga. Hence, I came to meet him," Gowda told reporters after meeting Eshwarappa.

Gowda too is said to be sulking as the BJP has replaced him with Union Minister of State for Agriculture Shobha Karandlaje from Bengaluru North.

Also, supporters of sitting BJP MP from Koppal, Karadi Sanganna, went on a rampage after he was denied a ticket.

—PTI

CONG CAN'T FIND CANDIDATES, SAYS BOMMAI

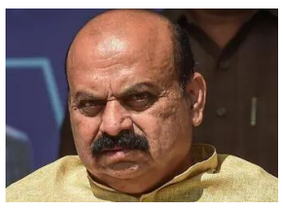
BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Former chief minister Basavaraja Bommai, BJP candidate from the Haveri constituency, on Thursday, said that fearing defeat, the ruling Congress party was not able to find candidates and that State Ministers are refusing to contest polls.

Bommai met former chief minister and BJP leader BS Yediyurappa at his residence at Dollars Colony in Bengaluru to seek his blessings. Bommai said, "Yediyurappa has blessed him and has promised to campaign for him in the elections."

Speaking about the candidature of HD Deve Gowda's son-in-law CN Manjunath from Bengaluru Rural he said that Manjunath is known for helping lakhs of people. "BJP is the party that recognises service," Bommai added.

—Salar News



Basavaraja Bommai **PHOTO: PTI**

SILICON VALLEY IN TROUBLE

Techies get innovative to tackle water crisis

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

From exploring work from home (WFH) option and shifting to a place with better water facilities and taking bath on alternate days--citizens of India's tech capital are trying every possible thing to deal with an unprecedented water crisis that has gripped the city.

The woes have become a serious issue of concern for Bengalureans , especially in Whitefield, KR Puram, Electronic City, RR Nagar, Kengeri and CV Raman Nagar. Those staying in high rise apartments with water harvesting facilities are also now dependent on tankers for drinking water and many restrictions have been imposed.

Eateries in Bengaluru are mulling over use of disposable cups, glasses and plates to avoid excess use of water. Posters with catchy slogans -- "no rain no water," "water water everywhere but not a drop to drink", "conserve water", among others have been put up at many schools and building associations.

Educational institutions are also feeling the pinch. Recently, a coaching centre in the city asked its students to attend classes online due to an 'emergency' for a week. Similarly, a school on Bannerghatta Road was also closed, asking students to attend classes online just like they did during the Covid pandemic.

Meanwhile, some residents of a layout in KR Puram have come up with plans to take bath on alternate days, order food twice a week instead of cooking at home, and restricting water supply to their tenants. People say they are forced to pay more for the tanker water, although the rates have been capped by the government. With temperature rising, it is difficult to avoid a daily shower but they are left with no option but to take bath on alternative days, said Sujatha, also a resident of KR Puram.

PHOTO: PTI

- Woes have become an issue of concern for people in Whitefield, KR Puram, Electronic City, RR Nagar, Kengeri and CV Raman Nagar

"We do have facilities for rain water harvesting in our apartment but then we hardly got any rains last year. So, despite having facilities, we could hardly store any water. Now we have been asked by the building association to use water judiciously and one way of doing it was, we have been restricted to water supply at specified intervals," Shobha, a homemaker in Kengeri, said.Lakshmi V, an IT professional living in Singasandra, has been requesting her firm to allow WFH option so that she and her family can temporarily shift to her native place in Tiruchirapalli in Tamil Nadu until the situation becomes better.

To create awareness and educate children about the water crisis, building associations and schools have started putting up posters in their premises explaining them to conserve water.

—PTI

NOT GIVING WATER TO TN: GOVT SLAMS BJP

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday dismissed BJP's charge that Congress government was clandestinely releasing Cauvery river water to neighbouring Tamil Nadu amid the severe water shortage in the State.

Speaking to reporters, he said, "Rather than doing politics on water, the BJP must get approval for Mekedatu project as it would solve all the water issues in Bengaluru. They have launched a misinformation campaign unable to bear the government's efficient handling of the water crisis." He also requested BJP MPs and Union ministers to ensure that the State secure permission for Mekedatu project.

Asked about Home Minister Amit Shah's comments that INDIA bloc would not come to power, he said, "They have introduced CAA now as they fear losing elections. On sitting BJP MPSs missing tickets, he said, "As per my information, 10 sitting MPS will miss tickets. It is their party's internal matter, I am not going to comment on it " Asked if any BJP MP who has missed the ticket was joing the Congress, he said, "I can't comment on that at this moment." *—PTI*

Yaduveer joins BJP, Cong may field Urs' grandson

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar, the scion of the erstwhile royal family, joined BJP on Thursday at Jaganath Bhavan in Malleshwaram.

Yaduveer will contest from Mysuru-Kodagu replacing the current MP Pratap Simha.

Internet remained divided over his candidature. While some opined that the scion should stay away from politics, others expressed their loyalty to the royal family.

Meanwhile, Congress is considering fielding Suraj Hegde, the grandson of former chief minister D Devaraja Urs.

This move is anticipated to counterbalance BJP's candidate and potentially sway the electoral outcome in favour of Congress.

The Urs family has a history of electoral victories, having previously defeated Srikanthadutta Wadiyar, a BJP candidate, in the past. This feat was exemplified in 1991 when Chandraprabha Urs, contesting under the Congress banner, beat BJP's Srikanthadutta.

—Salar News

- While some opined that Yaduveer should stay away from politics, others expressed their loyalty to the royal family. Meanwhile, Congress is considering fielding Suraj Hegde, the grandson of former chief minister D Devaraja Urs

Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamraja Wadiyar, scion of erstwhile royal family visits BJP office after BJP announced him as Mysuru-Kodagu candidate on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

EVERY DROP COUNTS

A gardener splashes water at Vidhana Soudha premises in Bengaluru on Thursday. City has been facing severe water scarcity amid its worst drought in 40 years **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

DK Suresh mocks Dr CN Manjunath

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Bengaluru Rural MP and Congress leader DK Suresh took a dig at CN Manjunath, JD(S) Supremo HD Deve Gowda's son-in-law and former director of Sri Jayadeva Institute of Cardiovascular Sciences and Research, for joining BJP instead of JD(S).

Suresh dubbed Manjunath as a brilliant son-in-law who decided not to join his father-in-law's party. "May god bless him," said Suresh.JD(S) urged Suresh to pay attention to his party. "If we talk about Congress' situation all over the country, it will become a great novel for you," JD(S) said.

The party defended Manjunath's move and said, "There is nothing wrong with the son-in-law being smart. He is your rival, so get ready to compete against him. Apart from that nothing else is your business," retorted JD(S).

You target Deve Gowda's family yet Karnataka Congress revolves around your family. Your brother is Deputy Chief Minister, you are a Congress MP, S Ravi who is a member of Legislative Council is your close aide, and Kunigal MLA HD Ranganath is Shivakumar's co-brother. Is this a family policy or a family package?" JD(S) asked.

—Salar News

Use water judiciously, says DKS

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Thursday urged people to use water judiciously in light of the deepening water crisis in the City. He also highlighted the need to create awareness among the public on the issue.

Speaking at the launch of "Neeru Ulisi Bengaluru Belasi" (Save Water, Develop Bengaluru) a campaign by the Bengaluru Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Shivakumar asked people to get prior permission from the board before drilling new borewells.

"Bengaluru has been crippling without rain this year. Atleast, 6900 bore wells are dry and the remaining 7000 are active. Efforts are being made to control and utilise the water from borewells," Shivakumar said. Shivakumar also launched four mobile apps, Jalamitra, Parisara Jalasnehi, Andar Jala, and Samrakshaka to tackle the water crisis. It allows information regarding underground water, water protection, water mitra and water friendly for better management of the crisis.

Reacting to the BJP's allegations Shivakumar who is also the Minister of Water Resources said, "BJP should quit politics in this matter and should urge the Central Government to approve the Mekedatu project, which will provide water to Bengaluru."

—Salar News

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar flags off the 'Save Water for growth Bengaluru' Campaign vehicles in front of Vidhana Soudha on Thursday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

60% KANNADA

In India's tech capital, Kannada gets 'prominence' on boards

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

With the deadline for complying with 60 per cent use of Kannada in signboards of businesses and establishments coming to an end, a vast majority of them in the city appear to have obeyed the mandate, with many even going for stopgap arrangements, aimed at ensuring compliance.

A bill mandating 60 per cent use of Kannada in signboards of businesses and establishments was passed by the Karnataka Assembly in February, and the government had warned that non-compliance would lead to the cancellation of the licences of businesses.

Now, temporary boards or banners instead of boards that are not rules compliant, and also clothes or stickers covering the old boards, can be seen at several places in the city, in a bid to avoid fines and other penal action.

An English language signboard covered after mandate of Kannada display on signboards, in Bengaluru on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

Many traders say that in the wake of rules and the deadline for compliance, board makers or artists were besieged by traders and businesses with orders. There are supply side constraints, with an inadequate number of competent board artists to meet the surge in demand, coupled with resources and logistic issues.

A shop owner said he had been to several board makers and artists, and many did not take his order, citing that "their hands are full."

Agreeing that there have been some delays on their part in delivering orders on time as required by the customers, board designers and manufacturers say, the process is time-consuming, and they are also facing a shortage of manpower to meet the sudden rise in demand, along with logistic issues.

According to official sources out of 50,357 shops and commercial establishments that were identified for violations, 49,732 have complied with the new rules, and the remaining 625 shops are yet to comply or are in the process.

—PTI

- A shop owner said he had been to several board makers and artists, and many did not take his order, citing that "their hands are full."

DKS warns pro-Kannada activists against violence

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Karnataka DyCM DK Shivakumar on Thursday warned pro-Kannada activists that they should not take the law into their own hands for implementing the 60:40 rule for the use of Kannada on signboards. "60:40 signboards are mandatory. The government is committed to implementing it," Shivakumar told reporters. "We allowed time because the manufacturing of the signboards was taking a lot of time. But I don't want pro-Kannada activists to take the law into their hands on this issue," he added. Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) has said that the rule has already seen 98 per cent implementation. Shivakumar had orally announced the extension by two weeks of deadline of 28 February. His announcement came after BBMP started to shut down shops for non-compliance.

—PTI

SIT to probe PSI recruitment scam

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

The Karnataka cabinet on Thursday decided to set up a Special Investigation Team to probe the police sub-inspector recruitment scam.

The decision to form a Special Investigation Team (SIT) was taken on the recommendations of Justice B Veerappa Commission. Justice Veerappa recently submitted his report on the scam and said that 113 people were involved in it including government officers, employees and some middlemen.

Though some people did not respond to the summons, they gave statements in public but did not appear before the commission, Karnataka Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda told reporters.

Since the commission does not have power to summon them forcibly, it said that statements of such people should be obtained through another probe, the minister said.

"Based on the suggestions of the Commission, the cabinet has decided to set up an SIT," Gowda said.

According to him, already the Crime Investigation Department (CID) is probing 17 cases, since the commission highlighted more points that need a probe, an SIT was recommended. Gowda clarified that there was no proposal to stop the investigation by the CID as it would lead to confusions.

The PSI recruitment exam was conducted in October 2021.

Large scale irregularities in it forced the government to cancel the examination. Several police officers including ADGP Amrit Paul were arrested.

—PTI

CAA will never be taken back: Amit Shah

Shah said that it is everyone's sovereign right to ensure Indian citizenship in their country

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

- Days after the central government notified the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the law will never be taken back and the BJP-led government will never compromise with it

Days after the central government notified the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), Union Home Minister Amit Shah said that the law will never be taken back and the BJP-led government will never compromise with it.

In an interview to ANI, Shah said, "This is our sovereign right to ensure Indian citizenship in our country, we will never compromise on it and CAA will never be taken back." Asked about the Opposition INDIA bloc, specifically a Congress leader stating that they would repeal the law when they will come to power, the Home Minister said that even the opposition is aware it has bleak chances of coming to power. "Even INDIA alliance knows that it will not come into power. CAA has been brought by the BJP party, and the NarendraModi-led government has brought it. It is impossible to repeal it. We will spread awareness about it in the whole nation so that those who want to repeal it do not get a place," Shah said.

The union minister also dismissed criticism that the "CAA is unconstitutional" stating that it does not violate the constitutional provisions. "They always talk about Article 14. They forget that there are two clauses in that Article. This law does not violate Article 14. There is a clear, reasonable classification here. This is a law for those who, due to partition, remained in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Bangladesh and were facing religious persecution and decided to come to India," the Union Minister said. —*ANI*

Pro-CAA Hindu and Sikh refugees march towards Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's residence demanding an apology from him over his statement about 'who will give refugees jobs and houses', in New Delhi on Thursday; Members of All Assam Student Union protest against CAA in Assam **PHOTO: PTI**

CAA completely insignificant in Assam: Himanta

GUWAHATI, 14 MARCH

Chief Minister Himanta BiswaSarma on Thursday claimed that Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 (CAA) is completely insignificant in Assam, from where there will be the "least number of applications" for Indian citizenship.

The Ministry of Home Affairs had on Tuesday launched a portal for people eligible to apply for Indian citizenship under the CAA.

The Centre on Monday implemented the CAA, 2019, notifying the rules four years after the law was passed by Parliament to fast-track citizenship for undocumented non-Muslim migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan who came to India before 31December, 2014.

Sarma said the act is very clear that the cut-off date for application of citizenship is 31December, 2014, and in Assam, with the updation of the National Register of Citizens, people who applied for it and did not find their names in that list, will only apply for CAA.

"People seeking citizenship have to give evidence that they entered before 2014 and the NRC will be the proof in Assam, but in other states, this does not exist," he said. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Mamata Banerjee suffers major injury, admitted to hospital

KOLKATA, 14 MARCH

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday evening suffered a major injury on her forehead and was admitted to a hospital, TMC said. "Our chairperson @MamataOfficial sustained a major injury. Please keep her in your prayers," the party posted on X along with pictures of Banerjee bleeding from her forehead. According to sources, she was admitted to the state-run SSKM Hospital in Kolkata. The details of how she received the injury are still awaited. TMC National General Secretary and Mamata's nephew Abhishek Banerjee got her admitted to the hospital, according to party sources. State BJP President Sukanta Majumdar wished her a speedy recovery. —*PTI*

Kejriwal moves sessions court challenging summons

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has moved the Sessions Court challenging summons issued to him by Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate on ED complaints for not complying with the summons issued by the central probe agency in the Delhi liquor policy money laundering case.The Special Judge, Rakesh Syal, is scheduled to hear the matter this afternoon.Last week, the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate took cognizance of the Enforcement Directorate's second complaint and issued a fresh summons to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal for his personal appearance before the court on 16 March, 2024.ED recently moved the court with a second complaint for allegedly not complying with the summons in the alleged Delhi liquor policy money laundering case. Following the summons order, Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal appeared virtually before the court on the ED's complaint against him for allegedly non-compliance with the summons order. —*ANI*

Sudha Murty takes oath as RS MP

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Engineer-turned-philanthropist Sudha Murty on Thursday took oath as Rajya Sabha MP in the presence of her husband NR Narayana Murthy. Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar administered the oath in his chamber in Parliament House. Murty, 73, the former chairperson of Infosys Foundation and the author of several books, mostly for children, was nominated to the Rajya Sabha on International Women's Day last Friday. She is also renowned for her contribution to Kannada and English literature and is a recipient of the Sahitya Akademi Bal Sahitya Puraskar, the Padma Shri (2006) and the Padma Bhushan (2023). —*PTI*

Assam govt hikes 4% DA for employees: Himanta

GUWAHATI, 14 MARCH

The Assam government has decided to hike the dearness allowance by 4 per cent for its employees and pensioners on the occasion of Rongali Bihu in April, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on Thursday. The increase in DA will be effective from 1 January, and the arrears of the first three months will be paid in instalments in May, June and July respectively, Sarma said at a press conference here. The DA hike will benefit around four lakh government employees and 3.5 lakh pensioners, he said. —*PTI*

One Nation, One Election: 32 parties support, 15 oppose

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The high-level committee on 'one nation, one election' approached 62 parties out which 47 responded -- 32 in support of holding elections simultaneously, 15 against it, according to the report of the panel submitted to President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday.

"32 political parties not only favoured the system of simultaneous elections, but also advocated its adoption for saving scarce resources, protecting social harmony, and stimulating economic development," the report said.

Among the national parties, Congress, AAPand Communist Party of India (Marxist) opposed the proposal, saying it undermines democracy and the basic structure of the Constitution,

while BJP and National People's Party supported it. Bahujan Samaj Party(BSP) did not explicitly oppose it, but highlighted concerns regarding the large territorial extent and population of the country, which could make implementation challenging, said the

Droupadi Murmu **PHOTO: PTI**

report.

Among state parties, AIUDF, Trinamool Congress, AIMIM, CPI, DMK, Naga People's Front, and Samajwadi Party opposed the proposal to hold simultaneous elections.

Samajwadi Party in its submission said if simultaneous elections are implemented, state-level parties will not be able to compete with national parties in electoral strategy and expenditure leading to increased discord between these two sets of parties.

AIADMK, All Jharkhand Students Union, Apna Dal (Soney Lal), ASOM Gana Parishad, Biju Janata Dal, Lok Janshakti Party (R), Mizo National Front, Nationalist Democratic Progressive Party, Shiv Sena, Janata Dal (United), Sikkim Krantikari Morcha, Shiromani Akali Dal, and United People's Party Liberal supported the proposal.

Others including Bharat Rashtra Samiti, Indian Union Muslim League, Jammu And Kashmir National Conference, Janata Dal (Secular), Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Kerala Congress (M), Nationalist Congress Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Rashtriya Loktantrik Party, Revolutionary Socialist Party, Sikkim Democratic Front, Telugu Desam Party, and YSR Congress Party did not respond. Among other parties, CPI(ML) Liberation, Social Democratic Party of India opposed it, while Rashtriya Lok Janata Dal, Bharatiya Samaj Party, Gorakha National Liberal Front, Hindustani Aavam Morcha, Rashtriya Lok Jan Shakti Party, Rashtrawadi Congress Party (Ajit Pawar) were among those who opposed. —*PTI*

TN min Anbarasan booked for remarks against Modi

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Delhi Police has filed an FIR against Tamil Nadu minister TM Anbarasan for his alleged threatening remarks against Prime Minister Narendra Modi made at a public rally in the southern state, officials said on Thursday.

The FIR was filed at the Parliament Street police station here on Wednesday on the basis of a complaint from Supreme Court lawyer Satya Ranjan Swain, they said.

According to the FIR, Anbarasan, openly threatened to chop Modi into pieces.

"The threatening statement made by Anbarasan is not only alarming and posing a significant risk to the safety and security of our prime minister, but is also shameful and has been deliberately made to stir the peace and stability of our nation and evoke violence," the FIR says.

The FIR registered under sections 153 (wantonly giving provocation, with intent to cause riot), 268 (negligent conduct with respect to explosive substance), 503, 505 and 506 of the IPC. —*PTI*

SANDESHKHALI ROW

TMC's Arjun Singh to return to BJP

KOLKATA, 14 MARCH

Disgruntled Trinamool Congress leader Arjun Singh on Thursday backed up his announcement of 'gharwapsi' to the BJP with a sensational claim that Sandeshkhali's alleged kingpin Shajahan Sheikh owned large tracts of land and other properties in Naihati under active patronage of local TMC MLA Partha Bhowmik.

Singh also claimed that "at least one top TMC leader" would be joining the saffron party along with him. Refusing to divulge any further details, Singh confirmed that he would be travelling to Delhi on Thursday evening itself and join the BJP at its central headquarters on Friday.

Referring to Bhowmik's visit to Sandeshkhali in the aftermath of protests by villagers in February, Singh said, "Why did the TMC top brass send Partha Bhowmik, instead of the local MLA, to Sandeshkhali to defend Shajahan and his cohorts? That's because he had close contacts with Sheikh and needed to secure the evidence connecting him to Sheikh in the wake of the ED raid."

Bhowmik refuted Singh's claims of his Sandeshkhali visit, stating he went there to address certain complaints with regard to irrigation facilities which the local peasants had. —*PTI*

Arjun Singh also claimed that at least one more top TMC leader would be joining the saffron party along with him **PHOTO: PTI**

ED raids premises of 2 bizmen over links with Shahjahan Sheikh

KOLKATA, 14 MARCH

The ED conducted raids at the residences of two businessmen with "close links" to arrested TMC leader Shajahan Sheikh, in West Bengal's Sandeshkhali, in connection with an alleged ration distribution scam, an official said. Sleuths of the probe agency also raided a marketplace owned by one of the businessmen. "These two businessmen had helped Sheikh in siphoning money meant for ration distribution, and used the funds in fish trade," he said. —*PTI*

POLL PREPARATIONS

BJD holds meeting, keeps mum on possible alliance with BJP

BHUBANESWAR, 14 MARCH

Ruling Biju Janata Dal (BJD) of Odisha on Thursday held a meeting on "poll preparations and strategies", but its leaders are tight-lipped about possible electoral tie-up with BJP.

The meeting was held at BJD President and state Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik's residence, in which senior leaders and district observers were present. After the meeting, BJD Vice-President and MLA Debi Prasad Mishra told reporters that

Naveen Patnaik **PHOTO: PTI**

the party discussed poll preparations, strategies and the situation in each constituency.

He said Patnaik gave certain suggestions to the party observers, who presented reports of the ground situation. Mishra avoided questions on the party's possible alliance with BJD.

Earlier in the day, BJD national spokesperson Santrupt Misra had said that the party leadership would inform the media about the issue at the appropriate time. This was the second meeting of top BJD leaders after the talks on the possible alliance started making the rounds.

They had met earlier on 6 March, a day after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Odisha. —*PTI*

TDP releases 2nd list of 34 candidates

AMRAVATI, 14 MARCH

The Telugu Desam Party on Thursday released its second list of 34 candidates for the upcoming assembly elections in Andhra Pradesh, days after releasing its first list.

In a message on X, Naidu wrote, "The first list of candidates contesting on behalf of the Telugu Desam Party in the upcoming 2024 elections has already been placed before the public. Now we have brought you the second list, with 34 more candidates.".

In the run-up to the elections for the state assembly and Lok Sabha, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and Jana Sena Party (JSP) sealed a seat-sharing pact in Andhra Pradesh on Monday.

Chandrababu Naidu's TDP and Narendra Modi's BJP have tied up with Jana Sena Party of Pawan Kalyan (not in pic) **PHOTO: PTI**

According to the pact, the BJP will contest from six seats, the TDP from 17 seats and the JSP from two seats for the parliamentary elections.

In the assembly elections, the BJP will contest from 10 seats, the TDP from 144 seats and the JSP from 21 seats, as per the statement. —*ANI*

I'M WITH SHARAD PAWAR FACTION: NCP MLA LANKE

PUNE, 14 MARCH

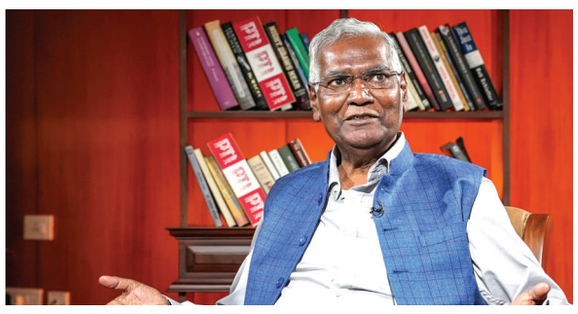
Nationalist Congress Party MLA Nilesh Lanke on Thursday said he was with the Sharad Pawar faction and was following the ideology of the opposition stalwart. Lanke, who is MLA from Parner in Ahmednagar district, was presumed to have sided with the faction led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar following the split in the Sharad Pawar-founded party in July last year. Incidentally, on Wednesday the BJP renominated sitting MP Sujay Vikhe Patil from Ahmednagar, from where Lanke too is keen to contest. —*PTI*

'DEMOCRACY UNDER ATTACK'

2024 polls critical for India's future: D Raja

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Communist Party of India General Secretary D Raja on Thursday said that, the 2024 Lok Sabha elections are very critical for India's future as the country's secular democracy is "under attack". He further said that defeating BJP is necessary to save the Constitution and democracy."The 2024 elections are very very critical for the country and its future. For the past 10 years what we witnessed is a disastrous rule... Modi claimed maximum governance, minimum government, but the governance has become



CPI General Secretary D Raja during an interview with PTI, in New Delhi on Wednesday **PHOTO: PTI**

minimum, even minus... democracy is in peril. Parliament is becoming redundant," he said.

He downplayed the recent consecration of Ram Temple in Ayodhya in the context of the upcoming polls, and said BJP wants to use it for political advantage and people understand it.

"I do not think that it is going to have any impact (on poll). BJP's understanding of Ram is different from the people's understanding of Lord Ram," he said.

Tearing into BJP's "Modi ki Guarantee" slogan, Raja said, "What is that guarantee? When. Modi became Prime Minister, he said his government would generate two crore jobs per year. Now after 10 years, 20 crore jobs should have been created. Where are those jobs? Is it not Modi's guarantee? Then you say it is Modi's jumla...That Modi told lies to the people," he said.

Raja quoted BR Ambedkar to say that Parliament is the supreme institution of the country's democracy. "Parliament represents the sovereign will of the people. In fact, the Parliament belongs to the Opposition, because the Opposition has to question the government and its policies," he said.

He said Modi gave the Bharat Ratna award to MS Swaminathan, but is not implementing the Swaminathan commission report which proposed the minimum support price. "Modi's guarantee is nothing but deceit with the people at the time of election," he said. —*PTI*

Punjab: AAP releases first list of candidates

CHANDIGARH, 14 MARCH

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday released its first list of eight candidates for Punjab for the Lok Sabha polls, fielding five Cabinet ministers.

The state's ruling party also named a former Congress MLA and a Punjabi actor as its candidates for the polls expected to be held April-May.

The AAP, which is a constituent of the opposition INDIA bloc, is contesting the parliamentary polls on its own in Punjab, which sends 13 members to the Lower House of Parliament. According to the list released by the party, NRI Affairs Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal has been fielded from Amritsar, Transport Minister Laljit Singh Bhullar from Khadoor Sahib, Agriculture Minister Gurmeet Singh Khudian from Bathinda, Sports Minister and two-time MLA Gurmeet Singh Meet Hayer from Sangrur and Health minister Dr Balbir Singh from Patiala.

The party has named ex-Congress MLA from Bassi Pathana Gurpreet Singh GP from the Fatehgarh Sahib Lok Sabha constituency. He had joined the Arvind Kejriwal-led AAP recently.

Famous Punjabi actor Karamjeet Anmol, has been fielded from Faridkot for the polls. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Ex-president Pratibha Patil hospitalised, condition stable

PUNE, 14 MARCH

Former President Pratibha Patil has been admitted to a hospital in Maharashtra's Pune city for the treatment of fever and chest infection and her condition is stable, officials of the medical facility said on Thursday. Patil, 89, was admitted to the Bharati Hospital here on Wednesday."Former President Pratibha Patil was admitted to the hospital last night. She is having fever along with some infection in the chest. Her health condition is stable. She is under treatment and is being monitored closely," a senior official from the hospital said. Patil was the first woman to serve as the President of India. She held the top constitutional post from 2007 to 2012.—*PTI*

Road crash in Rajasthan leaves four dead

JAIPUR, 14 MARCH

In an accident, four people were killed and two others injured after a truck and car collided in Rajasthan's Hanumangarh district on Thursday, police said. The accident took place near Rawatsar town when the car passengers were on way to the Khetrapal temple in Rawatsar, police said. "Prima facie the car driver dozed off while overtaking. Four people were killed and two others injured. All were going to offer prayers at a temple," Station House Officer, Rawatsar, Vedpal said. He said that the deceased were identified as Vimla,55 , her daughter Rachna,23 , Manju,40, and Mansaram Prajapat, all residents of Churu district. The truck driver fled from the spot.—*PTI*

DRI busts gold smuggling; seizes gold worth ₹40 cr

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) claimed to have busted a big syndicate involved in the smuggling of foreign-origin gold worth around Rs 40 crore, an official statement said. The press release said that the operation, meticulously planned and coordinated across four states, resulted in the seizure of a huge quantity of smuggled gold, weighing around 61.08kg and valued at around Rs. 40 crore, along with 19 vehicles, cash and other electronic items in Guwahati, Barpeta, Darbhanga, Gorakhpur and Araria. Acting on specific intelligence, the DRI officers in Guwahati apprehended six members of the syndicate, including two masterminds, from a residential premises at Guwahati and recovered 22.74kg of gold, cash amounting to Rs 13 lakh, vehicles, and other electronic items. A vehicle, which had already left Guwahati, was tracked down and intercepted at Barpeta, over90km from Guwahati. 13.28kg of smuggled gold was recovered from the intercepted vehicle and another two people were apprehended, the statement said. —*ANI*

Odisha govt employees get 4 pc DA hike

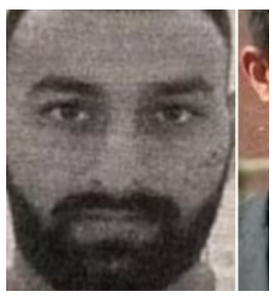
BHUBANESWAR, 14 MARCH

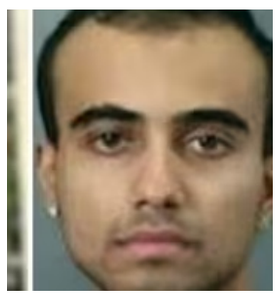
Odisha Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on Thursday announced a 4-per cent increase in dearness allowance and dearness relief for state government employees and pensioners. With the latest hike, the DA and DR rose to 50 per cent from 46 per cent. The enhanced amount will be paid from 1 January, 2024, retrospectively, a release issued by the Chief Minister's Office said. This will benefit 4.5 lakh state government employees and 3.5 lakh pensioners, officials said.—*PTI*

US soil being used for terrorist activities against India, FBI told

Indian Americans pointed out sudden surge of crimes against Indians in US

WASHINGTON, 14 MARCH





Shreyas Reddy Beniger, Vivek Saini, Neel Acharya and Sameer Kamath are among the Indian students who were killed in the US this year

PHOTOS: LINKEDIN/X

A group of eminent Indian Americans in Silicon Valley has held a special meeting with senior officials of the Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and police and told that the US soil is being used for terrorist activities against India.

The group held the meeting with senior officials of the Department of Justice, FBI and local police this week on increasing hate crimes against Hindus in California.

During the meeting, Indian Americans expressed their displeasure and dissatisfaction that the law enforcement agencies in the US have not been able to take any action against those who are espousing terrorism activities in India, according to multiple persons present in the meeting.

The meeting to address the challenging issue of the rise in hate crimes against Hindu and Jain places of worship was held at the initiative of community leader Ajai Jain Bhutoria.

It was attended by about two dozen eminent Indian Americans.

Vincent Plair and Harpreet Singh Mokha from the Department of Justice's Community Relations Service along with FBI officials and those from the police departments of San Francisco, Milpitas, Freemont and Newark attended the meeting.

- Indian Americans expressed their displeasure and dissatisfaction that the law enforcement agencies in the US have not been able to take any action against espousing terrorism activities in India

The sudden increase in hate crimes against Indian Americans in general and the Hindus in particular is causing a lot of fear and anxiety in the community, said the Indian Americans after the meeting which was closed to the press.

There is a fear in the community right now.

The Khalistan people park trucks outside schools, and Indian grocery stores and intimidate young Indian Americans.

Several community members expressed their anger that the law enforcement agencies have not been able to take any action against those people, including those who tried to burn the Indian consulate in San Francisco, and are openly threatening Indian diplomats and giving open calls for terrorist incidents in India.

—*PTI*

Stray dogs maul kid to death, HC orders probe

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The Delhi High Court on Thursday directed the Delhi Police to investigate the "nature" of pets kept by residents in Dhobi Ghat area of Tuqhlaq Lane area where a one-and-a half-year-old girl was allegedly mauled to death by a pack of dogs last month.

Justice Subramonium Prasad asked the police to file a status report before 19 March giving the details.

The court was hearing a petition by the infant's father seeking a Rs 50 lakh compensation for the death of the child.

"Police are directed to investigate regarding the nature of pets that are kept in the area. It is also stated that there was a pitbull in the area. Investigate this. Status report be filed by Tuesday," the court said.

During the hearing, the court asked the police to also find out if there was any pet dog in the nearby houses where the incident took place.

The court said it was seeking the information just to rule out the apprehension of a ferocious dog kept in a nearby house which could have attacked the child.

One of the counsel, representing an NGO which was seeking to be impleaded in the case, claimed there was a pitbull in the area.

The High Court had earlier issued notice to the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC), the city government, and the police and sought a status report from them with regard to the steps taken to ensure that such incidents do not take place again.

—*PTI*

JUSTICE FOR 580 WORKERS

Cleanliness for one class cannot be 'slavery' for others: Court

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

The workers' union had sought the civic body to make 580 of its members as permanent staff

PHOTO: PTI

In a welfare state, cleanliness for one class of citizens cannot be achieved by engaging others in slavery, the Bombay High Court has said and directed the city civic body to declare 580 of its workers as permanent employees and extend all benefits to them.

A single bench of Justice Milind Jadhav in the judgment in November 2023, made available on Thursday, noted the fundamental right of citizens to a clean environment cannot be achieved by subjugating the fundamental rights of the workers to basic human dignity.

The court was hearing a petition filed by the Municipal Corporation of Greater Mumbai (MCGM), challenging an order passed by the Industrial Tribunal directing it to create posts for 580 temporary workers.

The workers' union, 'Kachara Vahatuk Shramik Sangh', had sought the civic body to make 580 of its members as permanent staff. They carry out the work of sweeping and cleaning public roads and collection and transportation of garbage.

The High Court bench, while dismissing the MCGM's petition, said quashing the tribunal's order would be a "travesty of justice".

The High Court noted the 580 workers provide the foundation on which the city functions, but instead of acknowledging this and giving them the stability of a permanent tenure, the civic body has taken advantage of its dominant position to exploit the lowest strata of the community. —*PTI*

Arms & ammo of HNLC seized in Meghalaya

SHILLONG, 14 MARCH

Arms and ammunition belonging to the outlawed Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) outfit were seized in Meghalaya's Ri-Bhoi district, police said.

The seizures were made on the basis of information provided by four persons associated with the outfit who were arrested in connection with an IED blast in disputed Punjabi Lane area of Shillong.

"Firearms, gelatin sticks, detonators and ignition fuses, along with flags of the HNLC, were seized in Ri-Bhoi district on Wednesday," Superintendent of Police Jagpal Dhanoa Singh told PTI.

At least one person was injured in the blast in disputed Punjabi Lane area on Saturday night.

The four accused, who were arrested on Monday, were working as per directions issued by their handlers, belonging to the outfit, based in adjoining Bangladesh, the SP said.

Two others, including a leader of the Hynniewtrep National Youth Front, identified as its disciplinary secretary Tarzan Lymba, were also arrested on Sunday night for their alleged involvement in the IED blast.Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma had recently assured of taking tough action against the perpetrators of the blast. "Several people have been arrested and tough action is being taken. We will ensure that those responsible are brought to the book," he had said. Sikhs living in the disputed Punjabi Lane, have alleged that the blast was triggered to derail the negotiation process for shifting the residents. —*ANI*

6 booked for beating teen to death in Mumbai

THANE, 14 MARCH

A 17-year-old student was allegedly beaten to death by his six college mates at Turbhe in Navi Mumbai, following which a case has been registered against them, police said on Thursday.

The incident occurred around 1pm on Wednesday outside their college, in which a friend of the deceased was injured, they said.

"The accused punched and kicked the victim to death and also beat and injured his friend. The motive behind the crime is being investigated," senior inspector Ajay Shinde said.

Based on a complaint lodged by the victim's father, the First information Report (FIR) in this connection was registered at the Agricultural Produce Market Committee (APMC) police station. under Indian Penal Code (IPC) sections 302 (murder), 326 (causing grievous hurt by dangerous weapons or means), 323 (voluntarily causing hurt), 143 (unlawful assembly), 147 (rioting) and others, he said.

—*PTI*

- The incident occurred around 1pm on Wednesday outside their college, in which a friend of the deceased was injured, they said.

POLICE, NAXALS EXCHANGE FIRE IN CHHATTISGARH

KANKER, 14 MARCH

An exchange of fire took place between police and the Naxals in Chhattisgarh's Koyalibeda area on Thursday morning, Superintendent of Police (SP) of Kanker Kalyan Elesela said.

"Exchange of fire took place around 7.00am under the Koyalibeda police station limit on Thursday. Naxalites fled under the cover of forest," Kanker SP said.

Kanker SP said that District Reserve Guard (DRG) team and police are safe.

The Superintendent of Police, Gaurav Rai, confirmed the incident and said that the encounter took place between security forces and Naxalites in the border area of Dantewada, Bijapur. —*PTI*

Asaram Bapu rape case: Victim's dad gets security

SHAHJAHANPUR , 14 MARCH

Police here provided additional security to the father of a rape victim and lodged a First Information Report (FIR) after a video purportedly showed him

apologising for "making false allegations" against self-styled jailed godman Asaram Bapu, an officer said on Thursday.

Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar Meena said an FIR has been lodged, naming Anil Kumar Sharma, the name on the social media account from which the video was allegedly posted.

"Efforts are being made to identify the individual who has posted the video on social media handle with the name Anil Kumar Sharma and those involved in circulating the video on social media platforms with mala fide intentions," the SP said.

"We have received in writing from the victim's father that it's not him in the video which is doing the rounds on social media. Based on his complaint, we registered an FIR under provisions of the Information Technology Act at Kotwali police station on Wednesday evening," he added.The matter came to light when the girl's father, a resident of the Shahjahanpur district, approached police on Tuesday alleging a video was being circulated by the followers of Asaram to malign him and his family. An additional police gunner has been deputed to the security of the victim's father, SP said. —*PTI*

A TALE FROM J&K

Ramadan 'seharkhwaans' keep tradition alive

SRINAGAR, 14 MARCH

Hundreds of men from remote areas in Kashmir have taken up the role of drum beaters to wake people for 'sehri

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Hundreds of men of all ages from remote areas in Kashmir have taken up the role of drum beaters to wake up Muslims for their predawn 'sehri' before they start their day-long Ramadan fast.

Known as 'seharkhwaans', these men take up the job for several reasons -- poverty being the most common.

A night in the life of a seharkhwaan involves getting up at 2.30am and waking people by beating drums from 3.00am to 4.30am.

"The women wake up a little earlier than the men to cook or warm the food. So there has to be ample time between waking up and the end of the sehri, which is usually around 5.20am," Abdul Rehman Khatana, a veteran seharkhwaan in the city's Barbarshah area, told PTI.

Rafiq Ahmad Khan, who hails from Uri in Baramulla district, works as a construction labourer for the rest of the year but prefers to beat the drums as a seharkhwaan during Ramadan.

"I have been doing this work for seven years. There are no wages as such but people are very generous, especially during Ramadan. I earn more during this month than the rest of the year," Khan said.

- Known as 'seharkhwaans', these men take up the job for several reasons -- poverty being the most common

Working as a seharkhwaan in the posh Hyderpora area, Khan said the work allows him to observe the fasts as well.

"It is tough to work as a construction labourer while fasting. As a seharkhwaan, I can fast as well, " he added.

Zahooruddin Shah, a resident of Kupwara, comes to Srinagar every year during Ramadan to work as a seharkhwaan.

"I get good money for it. The best part is that I don't cook sehri for myself as the residents provide free food to me," he said.

The advent of mobile phones and alarm clocks had initially diminished the seharkhwaans' relevance."One can turn off the alarm clock or switch off the phone as giving up the night's sleep is not easy. However, the seharkhwaan does not give you that option. He beats the drum long enough that you cannot go back to sleep," said 61-year-old Manzoor Ahmad Dar, a resident of Gulberg Colony.The tradition of Ramadan drum beaters is several centuries old and is still practised in several countries such as India, Pakistan, Turkey, Morocco and the Palestinian Territory.

—*PTI*

PARENTS COMPLAIN

The state education department on Thursday ordered the removal of the exam centre administrator

PHOTO: PTI

Guj school asks girl students to remove hijab

BHARUCH, 14 MARCH

The parents of some girl students appearing for Class X examination in a Gujarat school have alleged that the administrator of the exam centre forced their wards to remove hijab before a paper, prompting the education department to take action against the school official.

According to the parents, the incident occurred at Lions School, a private school in Ankleshwar town in Bharuch district, on Wednesday before the mathematics paper.

Following the allegation, the state education department on Thursday ordered the removal of the exam centre administrator, Ilaben Suratiya, who is also the principal of that school.

The action against her was taken by District Education Officer Swati Raol, after she met the parents of these girl students, officials said.

The Gujarat Secondary and Higher Secondary Education Board (GSHSEB), which conducts the Class X exams, made it clear that there are no specific rules about the clothes worn by the examinees, and they can appear for the exam in any "decent" attire. Talking to reporters, a parent said, "The school principal and other staff harassed the girl students, including my own daughter, by asking them to remove their hijab ahead of the exam. My daughter cried for three hours after returning home.

It happened with nearly a dozen girls yesterday. We want the authorities to take action against those involved in this act."When confronted by the parents, Suratiya told them that she asked the girls to remove the hijabs because their faces were not clearly visible in the video. After meeting the parents, Raol ordered the removal of Suratiya.

—*PTI*

Women scientists played major role in Divyastra

Thane, 14 March

Showcasing the increasing role of women in the field of science in the country, a large number of female scientists were involved in the success of the Mission Divyastra led by the Programme Director Sheena Rani.Senior scientist Sheena Rani has been involved in many successful missile tests in the past also.

The programme project director Dr Shankari S also played a significant role. —*PTI*

1 dead, 9 injured after teen runs car over them

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

PHOTO: X

A 17-year-old polytechnic student was driving the car that killed a woman and injured nine people in east Delhi's congested Ghazipur market area, police said on Thursday, a day after the accident.

The accident took place on Wednesday night when a Hyundai Aura rammed into shops in the crowded weekly market leaving Sita Devi, 22, dead. Another teen in the car managed to escape, an official said.

The accident was caught on CCTV camera. The driver was seen trying to escape and being caught by locals who thrashed him before handing him over the police, he said.Irate crowds smashed the vehicle's windscreen and windows and tried to break its doors before flipping it over.The car, used for an online taxi service, is usually driven by Neeraj who has been asked to join the probe along with the owner Rajkumar.A case under the Indian Penal Code sections 279 (rash driving) and 304 (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) has been registered at Ghazipur Police Station, police said. —*ANI*

RAMADAN TIME

People shop at a local market during the holy month of Ramadan in Amman, Jordan, on Wednesday
PHOTO: PTI

EU greenlights landmark AI regulations

The European Parliament has given final approval to wide-ranging rules to govern artificial intelligence (AI).

The far-reaching regulation – the Artificial Intelligence Act – was passed by lawmakers on Wednesday. Senior European Union officials said the rules, first proposed in 2021, will protect citizens from the possible risks of a technology developing at breakneck speed while also fostering innovation.

Brussels has sprinted to pass the new law since Microsoft-backed OpenAI's ChatGPT arrived on the scene in late 2022, unleashing a global AI race.

Just 46 lawmakers in the European Parliament in Strasbourg voted against the proposal. It won the support of 523 MEPs.

The European Council is expected to formally endorse the legislation by May. It will be fully applicable 24 months after its entry into force.

The rules will cover high-impact, general-purpose AI models and high-risk AI systems, which will have to comply with specific transparency obligations and EU copyright laws.

The act will regulate foundation models or generative AI, such as OpenAI, that are trained on large volumes of data to generate new content and perform tasks.

Government use of real-time biometric surveillance in public spaces will be restricted to cases of certain crimes; prevention of genuine threats, such as "terrorist" attacks; and searches for people suspected of the most serious crimes.

"Today is again an historic day on our long path towards regulation of AI," said Brando Benifei, an Italian lawmaker who pushed the text through parliament with Romanian MEP Dragos Tudorache.

"[This is] the first regulation in the world that is putting a clear path towards a safe and human-centric development of AI," he said.

"We managed to find that very delicate balance between the interest to innovate and the interest to protect," Tudorache told journalists.

The act will regulate foundation models or generative AI, such as OpenAI, that are trained on large volumes of data to generate new content and perform tasks
PHOTO: PIXABAY

The EU's internal market commissioner, Thierry Breton, hailed the vote.

"I welcome the overwhelming support from the European Parliament for the EU AI Act," he said. "Europe is now a global standard-setter in trustworthy AI."

AI policing restrictions

EU's rules take a risk-based approach: the riskier the system, the tougher the requirements – with outright bans on the AI tools deemed to carry the most threat.

For example, high-risk AI providers must conduct risk assessments and ensure their products comply with the law before they are made available to the public.

"We are regulating as little as possible and as much as needed with proportionate measures for AI models," Breton told the Agence France-Presse news agency.Violations can see companies hit with fines ranging from 7.5 million to 35 million euros ($8.2m to $38.2m), depending on the type of infringement and the firm's size.

> Government use of real-time biometric surveillance in public spaces will be restricted to cases of certain crimes; prevention of genuine threats, such as "terrorist" attacks; and searches for people suspected crimes

There are strict bans on using AI for predictive policing and systems that use biometric information to infer an individual's race, religion or sexual orientation.The rules also ban real-time facial recognition in public spaces with some exceptions for law enforcement. Police must seek approval from a judicial authority before any AI deployment.

Lobbies vs watchdogs

Because AI will likely transform every aspect of Europeans' lives and big tech firms are vying for dominance in what will be a lucrative market, the EU has been subject to intense lobbying over the legislation.Watchdogs have pointed to campaigning by French AI start-up Mistral AI and Germany's Aleph Alpha as well as US-based tech giants like Google and Microsoft.

They warned the implementation of the new rules "could be further weakened by corporate lobbying", adding that research showed "just how strong corporate influence" was during negotiations.

"Many details of the AI Act are still open and need to be clarified in numerous implementing acts, for example, with regard to standards, thresholds or transparency obligations," three watchdogs based in Belgium, France and Germany said.

Breton stressed that the EU "withstood the special interests and lobbyists calling to exclude large AI models from the regulation", maintaining: "The result is a balanced, risk-based and future-proof regulation."

Tudorache said the law was "one of the ... heaviest lobbied pieces of legislation, certainly in this mandate", but insisted: "We resisted the pressure."

Courtesy, Al Jazeera

SALAR ساڵار

Poor nations struggle to cope with Covid: UN

Many countries are bouncing back from the Covid-19 pandemic, but the poorest are not and a significant number are seeing their conditions deteriorate, the UN Development Programme said on Wednesday.

Achim Steiner, Head of the agency, said that after two decades during which rich and poor countries were coming closer in terms of development, the finding is "a very strong warning signal" that nations are now drifting apart.

The Human Development Index that the agency has produced since 1990 is projected to reach record highs in 2023 after steep declines during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021.

But development in half of the world's poorest countries remains below 2019 pre-pandemic levels, the report said.

"It's a rich person's versus a poor person's world in which we are seeing development unfolding in very unequal, partially incomplete ways," Steiner said at a news conference. "Why does this matter? Not only because it creates more vulnerability, it creates also more misery and protracted poverty, growing inequality."

The growing inequalities are compounded by the concentration of economic wealth, the report said.

It pointed to almost 40 per cent of global trade in goods concentrated in three or fewer countries. And it said the stock market value of the three largest tech companies in 2021 — Amazon, Apple and Microsoft — surpassed the gross domestic product of more than 90 per cent of the 193 UN member nations that year.

Steiner said the world's nations should be joining forces to focus on major threats in the 21st century, especially climate change, the next pandemic and the emergence of a digital economy and artificial intelligence. But instead, he warned, there is increasing division and growing frustration and polarisation.

> The Human Development Index that the agency has produced since 1990 is projected to reach record highs in 2023 after steep declines during the pandemic years of 2020 and 2021

He said a significant response has been the emergence of populism, which is anti-elite and hostile to international cooperation. He said that "is increasingly dividing societies, radicalising the political discourse, and essentially turning more and more people against each other".

The report says advancing global collective action to tackle the world's major challenges is hindered by an emerging "democracy paradox" — 90 per cent of people worldwide endorse democracy but for the first time over half the respondents in a global survey expressed support for leaders that risk undermining the foundations of democracy.

Territorial conflicts will continue to crop up, but the threats to human security in the 21st century will more often require being able to collaborate, Steiner said.

"We are driving ourselves deeper and deeper into a condition where our ability to solve problems is actually being compromised," he said. "You will not stop climate change with missiles. You will not stop the next pandemic at your border with a tank, and you're certainly not going to stop cybercrime with missiles."

Steiner said it is important to dial down the temperature, misperceptions and misinformation "because they're actually being weaponised in turning people against each other."

He said there also has to be a very careful look "at where inequality has become so extreme that it actually erodes the political willingness to cooperate".

The report calls for more spending on global public goods that benefit all people, including to stabilise climate and the planet, to harness new technologies to improve human development, and to improve the global financial system to benefit low-income countries.

The agency's Human Development Index measures key issues for a long and healthy life, for gaining knowledge and for achieving a decent standard of living.

Based on the latest figures from 2022, the 10 places with the highest human development scores are Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, Hong Kong, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Ireland tied for seventh, Singapore, and Australia and the Netherlands tied for 10th place. The United States tied with Luxembourg for 20th place.

The 10 countries with the lowest human development were Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Yemen, Burundi, Mali, Chad, Niger, Central African Republic, South Sudan and Somalia. All but Yemen are in Africa.

—PTI

According to the reports, the development in half of the world's poorest countries remains below 2019 pre-pandemic levels
PHOTO: PTI

LETTERS

Write to us at salar@salar.news

Asif Sultan, the scribe caught in 'revolving door' of arrests

On 29 February, journalist Asif Sultan arrived at his home in Srinagar in Kashmir after being held on remand in jail for more than 2,000 days.

He barely spent five hours with his family before he was called to a local police station, where he was re-arrested.

"We had no idea that he would be arrested again," says Mohammad Sultan, his father.

Asif Sultan, 36, was first arrested in August 2018 and charged under an anti-terror law called the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA). Police accused him of helping and sheltering anti-India militants, which he denies.

His colleagues have alleged that he was targeted for writing an article in 2018 about Burhan Wani, a young militant leader whose death in a gun battle with government forces had sparked protests and deadly violence two years earlier

Militancy is a sensitive issue in Muslim-majority Kashmir, which has been a flashpoint between India and Pakistan for more than 75 years.

Since 1989, an armed revolt has been waged against India, claiming tens of thousands of lives. India blames Pakistan for stirring the unrest by backing separatist militants in Kashmir - a charge Islamabad denies.

For decades, journalists in Kashmir have had to tread carefully between the administration and militant groups while doing their jobs. But they say the federal government's crackdown on press freedom has worsened since August 2019 - that's when Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government revoked Jammu and Kashmir's partial autonomy and divided the state into two federally-administered territories.

Since the repeal of the state's special status in 2019, at least five journalists have been charged under the UAPA. Three others have been detained under the stringent Public Safety Act (PSA), which allows detention without charge for up to two years. Some, like Sultan, have been charged and detained under both.

Activists say police use a tactic known as "revolving door arrests", whereby people granted bail in one case are promptly re-arrested under another, effectively prolonging their detention.

Journalist, Asif Sultan's colleagues have alleged that he was targeted for writing an article in 2018 about Burhan Wani, a young militant leader whose death ihad sparked protests two years earlier
PHOTO: X/ FREE AASIF SULTAN

BBC contacted police officials in Kashmir by email but they have yet to respond to our questions about why Asif Sultan was re-arrested, why other journalists have been detained or to allegations that the authorities are cracking down on media freedoms in the region.

Sultan was in a Srinagar prison from August 2018 until April 2022, when a court granted him bail - in that case, the police's key witness against him had refused to identify him as an accused before the court.

But before he could be released, police detained him under the PSA, describing him as a "threat to peace."

He was then transferred to a jail in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh, around 1,500 km from his home.

In December 2023, a court in Srinagar quashed the detention under the PSA and ordered the authorities to release him. Despite that, it took 78 days to release him - prison authorities told online portal Newslaundry that the delay was because they had to get "clearance letters" from authorities in Kashmir.

Sultan had just about reached home on 29 February when he was picked up again - this time, his lawyer says, a case had been filed against him under the UAPA related to an incident of rioting that took place in Srinagar's Central Jail in 2019, when prisoners allegedly ransacked the barracks after an argument with prison staff.

> On 29 February Sultan was picked up again - this time, his lawyer says, a case had been filed against him under the UAPA related to an incident of rioting that took place in Srinagar's Central Jail in 2019, when prisoners allegedly ransacked the barracks after an argument with prison staff

"There were around 600 prisoners and Sultan wasn't in the barrack which was allegedly set on fire by some inmates," says his lawyer, Adil Abdullah Pandit, adding that they would file a bail plea soon.

Sultan is not the only local journalist currently jailed after being caught in the "revolving door" of arrests.

Sajad Gul was arrested in January 2022, on charges of "criminal conspiracy" and granted bail after nine days - but he was then detained under the PSA and transferred to a jail in Jammu, 300km from his home.Despite a local court ordering him to be freed last November, he remains in police custody.

Kunal Majumder, India representative of the Committee to Protect Journalists, says that the pattern of targeting journalists in Kashmir with multiple cases sends a "concerning signal" about the government's stance on press freedom.

"By repeatedly arresting journalists on various charges, often after they've been granted bail on previous ones, it suggests a systematic effort to intimidate and suppress critical voices," he said.

Even though they have been living in despair for years, Sultan's father says there is always "light at the end of the tunnel".

"There is nothing serious in the case. We are hopeful that we will see him again soon," he said.

—BBC News

PHOTO: X/ IMRANKHAN

Pak court rejects PTI backed Sunni Council's plea

PESHAWAR, 14 MARCH

A top Pakistani court on Thursday rejected a petition filed by the Sunni Ittehad Council, serving as a platform for jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party lawmakers, to allot them the reserved women and minority seats in the national and provincial assemblies. The Peshawar High Court resumed the hearing in the case being conducted by a five-member bench led by Chief Justice Mohammad Ibrahim Khan and comprising Justice Ijaz Anwar, Justice Ishtiaq Ibrahim, Justice Shakeel Ahmad and Justice Arshad Ali. The petition is unanimously rejected, the court said. A day ago, Attorney General for Pakistan Mansoor Usman Awan and the counsels for the Pakistan Peoples Party and the Election Commission of Pakistan had completed their arguments. AGP Awan had argued that a political party could get reserved seats only if it won a general one. *—PTI*

Neophyte, leader of Bulgaria's Church, dies

SOFIA, 14 MARCH

Patriarch Neophyte of Bulgaria, who was the first elected head of the Orthodox Church in the post-communist Balkan country, died at a hospital in Sofia. He was 78. The Orthodox Holy Synod said on Wednesday in a statement that the patriarch had been hospitalised for four months for lung ailments. The Holy Synod of 15 senior clergy will choose an interim patriarch until a larger church council picks Patriarch Neophyte's successor within the next four months, church officials said. Orthodox Christianity is Bulgaria's dominant religion, followed by some 85 per cent of the country's 6.7 million people. Patriarch Neophyte was the church's leader for 11 years succeeding his predecessor Maxim, who was at the helm of Bulgaria's dominant Orthodox Church during the turbulent transition period from communism to democracy. *—AP*

3 Indians arrested while entering US illegally

WASHINGTON, 14 MARCH

Three Indian nationals are among four people arrested in Upstate New York after they jumped off a moving freight train coming from Canada in their bid to enter the US illegally. US Border Patrol agents arrested the four, including a woman, on 12 March. The investigation concluded that all four people were undocumented non-citizens. Border Patrol agents assigned to the Buffalo Station spotted four people jumping off a moving freight train on the International Railroad Bridge in the city of Buffalo. The men left the woman who became immobile due to an injury and were caught after a foot pursuit. *—PTI*

Pakistan to set up country's biggest IT park in Islamabad

ISLAMABAD, 14 MARCH

Pakistan has decided to set up the country's biggest Information Technology Park here in the federal capital as part of newly-elected Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's efforts to enhance IT exports in the cash-strapped country, a media report said on Thursday. A plot spread across 3.3 acres in Sector G-10 of Islamabad has already been allocated for the construction of the IT Park after the Capital Development Authority Board, Islamabad's top civic amenities development body, greenlit the decision to establish the project with the help of a public-private partnership, The News International reported. Around 1,00,000 square feet of area will be covered in the plot, where at least 5,000 to 6,000 freelancers will be accommodated. *—PTI*

Russia polls today: Putin is set to win 6 more years

If Putin wins it will give him a full three decades of leading Russia

TALLINN, 14 MARCH

As Vladimir Putin heads for another six-year term as Russia's president, there's little electoral drama in the race. What he does after he crosses the finish line is what's drawing attention and, for many observers, provoking anxiety.

The voting that concludes on Sunday is all but certain to allow Putin to remain in office until 2030, giving him a full three decades of leading Russia as either President or Prime Minister. The heft of that long tenure and the thorough suppression of effective domestic opposition voices gives Putin a very strong — and perhaps unrestrained — hand. That position is bolstered by the Russian economy's surprising resilience despite wide-ranging Western sanctions following the invasion of Ukraine. It's also strengthened by Moscow's incremental but consistent battlefield advances in recent months, flagging support for military aid to Kyiv from the United States and other quarters, and growing skepticism in some Western countries over more progressive social attitudes that echoes Putin's push for "traditional values." Probably the most unpopular move he could make at home would be to order a second military mobilization to fight in Ukraine; the first, in September 2022, sparked protests, and a wave of Russians fled the country to avoid being called up. However unpopular a second mobilisation might be, it could also mollify relatives of the soldiers who were drafted 18 months ago. "Russian leaders are now talking of 'consolidating the whole of Russian society around its defence needs,'" Brian Michael Jenkins, a senior adviser at the RAND Corporation think tank said. In addition, Putin's apparent confidence that the war is turning in Russia's favor is likely to make him continue to insist that the only way to end the conflict is for Ukraine to sit down at the negotiating table, she said. "Which, in fact, means capitulation."

Alexandra Vacroux, executive director of the Davis Centre for Russian and Eurasian Studies at Harvard University, posits that Russia within several years will make an attempt to assess NATO's commitment to Article 5, the alliance's common defence guarantee under which an attack on one member is considered an attack on all. *—PTI*

The voting that concludes on Sunday is all but certain to allow Putin to remain in office until 2030 *PHOTO: PTI*

Where will elections take place?

27 Russian regions and Crimea

It's also the first Presidential election to use online voting

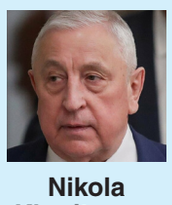
Who can vote?

Russian citizen over age 18 who is not in prison

here are 112.3 million eligible voters in Russia

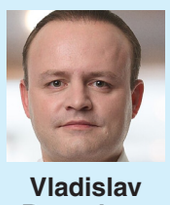
1.9 million eligible voters live abroad

WHO ARE OTHER CANDIDATES?



Nikola Kharitonov: Communist

Leonid Slutsky: LDPR



Vladislav Davankov: SPPS

If (rather when) Putin wins, he will be the longest-reigning Russian leader since Joseph Stalin

The EU said that they are ready to support Ukraine with whatever it takes to prevailx *PHOTO: X/TDF_UA*

EU agrees $5.48B boost for Ukraine's military aid

BRUSSELS, 14 MARCH

The European Union has agreed to provide five billion euros (USD 5.48 billion) for military support to Ukraine, as part of a revamp of an EU-run assistance fund, reported Al Jazeera.

In a move to extend military support to Ukraine as its forces struggle against Russia's invasion, the EU stated that it will support Ukraine with whatever it takes to prevail. European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, "We made it: #Coreper agreed on the #UkraineAssistanceFund. The Fund will allow us to step up our military support to #Ukraine with another EUR5 billion. The message is clear: we will support #Ukraine with whatever it takes to prevail."

Ambassadors from the EU's 27 member countries agreed to the overhaul of the European Peace Facility (EPF) fund at a meeting in Brussels on Wednesday after months of wrangling, with EU heavyweights France and Germany at the centre of much of the debate, reported Al Jazeera. The fund operated as a giant cashback scheme, giving EU members refunds for sending munitions to other countries.

France, a strong promoter of European defence industries, had insisted on a strong "buy European" policy for arms eligible for refunds.

However, other countries argued that such a requirement would inhibit efforts to buy weapons from worldwide to Ukraine quickly, according to Al Jazeera.

Germany has been by far Europe's biggest bilateral donor of military aid to Ukraine and has demanded donations be taken into account in determining the size of countries' financial contributions to the fund.

Diplomats said compromise was eventually reached allowing flexibility on the "buy European" rules and taking into account part of the value of bilateral aid when calculating members' financial contributions. *—PTI*

Gaza hostages' kin in despair as ceasefire deadline looms

JERUSALEM, 14 MARCH

A brother contemplated suicide. A sister stopped going to school. A father barely speaks. With each passing day, the relatives of hostages held in Gaza since 7 October face a deepening despair.

Their hopes were raised that a cease-fire deal was near to bring some of their loved ones home by the start of Ramadan, the Muslim holy month that began Monday. But that informal deadline passed without any agreement.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promise of "total victory" in the war against Hamas now rings hollow for many hostages' families after five emotionally draining months. "We are reading the news every single minute. Egypt says something, the Qataris say something different, the Americans say a deal is close, Israel says it's not," said Sharon Kalderon, whose brother-in-law, Ofer, remains in captivity. "We try to read between the lines, but we haven't heard anything about Ofer for months. Nothing that can help us breathe." When Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel on 7 October, they killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. Since then, Israel's offensive has killed more than 31,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, and driven hundreds of thousands to the brink of starvation.

About 120 hostages were freed during a November cease-fire that also led to the release of hundreds of Palestinians from Israeli prisons; three hostages were accidentally killed by Israeli forces during an attempted rescue mission.

Some families channel their desperation into unrelenting advocacy — travelling to the UN in New York, marching to Jerusalem from southern Israel, or wearing red shirts emblasoned with the words "Bring them Home" while running the Jerusalem marathon. *—PTI*

Israeli tanks parked in a staging area near the Gaza Strip border in Southern Israel on Thursday *PHOTO: PTI*

Hinduphobia on the rise in US: Thanedar

WASHINGTON, 14 MARCH

The US of late has seen a rise in Hinduphobia which needs to be fought because there is no place for hatred in this country, Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar has said, as he joined a group of Hindu leaders and organisations seeking to fight this growing hate crime against the community.

Representatives of various Indian American groups met on Wednesday at the US Capitol during a meeting organised by HinduAction.

"We see a lot of Hindu phobia. We see California SB403 (the bill banning caste discrimination), and that's just the beginning. The attacks on our temples and attacks on Hindus all over the world. That is one of the reasons why I decided to form the Hindu Caucus," Thanedar said.

"For the first time in the United States Congress, we have a Hindu Caucus. Number of initiatives we are taking to ensure that people have religious freedom to practice their religion the way they want to and not be, we need to fight this phobia, bigotry, and hatred. Because there should be no place for hatred in America, no place for hatred against people's religious rights. And so that's what we are focusing on in Congress," Thanedar, a Democrat, said. Suhag Shukla from the Hindu American Foundation said that college campuses in particular are experiencing rampant anti-Hindu bias and hate. She also listed out some of the major incidents of hate crime against the Hindu community in the US. "Just in the past two years we've seen a spike in anti-Hindu incidents," she said. *—PTI*

MASSIVE LANDSLIDE

An aerial view shows a property damaged by a landslide in the Sherman Oaks section of Los Angeles. The landslide has destroyed the hillside home. The Los Angeles Fire Department said in a statement several people were evacuated from one house *PHOTO: PTI*

'Ready for war': Kim drives new-type tank during drills

SEOUL, 14 MARCH

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un joined his troops in training to operate newly developed battle tanks as he called for bigger efforts to prepare for war, state media reported on Thursday.

The North's tank training was seen as a response to the annual 11-day South Korean-US military drills that are to end later Thursday. The North views its rivals' exercises a rehearsal for invasion.

The North's training on Wednesday was designed to inspect tankmen's combat capabilities and involved the new-type main battle tank that Kim called "the world's most powerful", the official Korean Central News Agency.

During the training, heavy tanks moved around various simulated harsh combat circumstances and fired rounds at targets. Kim mounted one of the new-type tanks and drove it himself, "adding to the high militant spirit of the tankmen of our army," KCNA said.

North Korea's Defense Ministry earlier vowed to carry out "responsible military activities" in reaction to the ongoing South Korea-US military exercises in the South. Kim later supervised artillery firing drills. The South Korean-US training involve a computer-simulated command post training and 48 kinds of field exercises, twice the number conducted last year. North Korea has dialled up its weapons testing activities since early 2022 in a bid to modernise and enlarge its nuclear and missile arsenals. *—AP*

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un joined his troops in training to operate newly developed battle tanks *PHOTO: X/NYPOST*

UK notifies 'more precise' definition of extremism

LONDON, 14 MARCH

The UK government on Thursday issued a new "more precise" definition of extremism in response to increased threats since the October 2023 Hamas terror attacks in Israel and to protect liberal democratic principles against extreme right-wing and Islamist extremists.

Extremism in the UK is now defined as the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence, hatred or intolerance, that aims to: negate or destroy the fundamental rights and freedoms of others; or undermine, overturn or replace the UK's system of liberal parliamentary democracy and democratic rights; or intentionally create a permissive environment for others to achieve the results in the first two categories. The previous definition, introduced in 2011 under the government's Prevent strategy, defined extremism as "vocal or active opposition to fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and belief".

UK Levelling Up and Communities Secretary Michael Gove said the update was needed to safeguard the UK as a multi-national, multi-ethnic, multi-faith democracy "success story", which is stronger because of its diversity.

"But our democracy and our values of inclusivity and tolerance are under challenge from extremists. In order to protect our democratic values, it is important both to reinforce what we have in common and to be clear and precise in identifying the dangers posed by extremism," said Gove.

"The pervasiveness of extremist ideologies has become increasingly clear in the aftermath of the 7 October (2023) attacks and poses a real risk to the security of our citizens and our democracy. This is the work of extreme right-wing and Islamist extremists who are seeking to separate Muslims from the rest of society and create division within Muslim communities," he said. *—PTI*

Extremism in the UK is now defined as the promotion or advancement of an ideology based on violence *PHOTO: ANADOLU AGENCY*

UN REPORT

Congo violence displaces 250K in just a month

GOMA, 14 MARCH

Escalating violence in Congo's eastern region has displaced at least 250,000 people in the last month, a senior United Nations official said on Wednesday, describing the situation as an unprecedented humanitarian crisis.

Far from the nation's capital, Kinshasa, eastern Congo has long been overrun by more than 120 armed groups seeking a share of the region's gold and other resources as they carry out mass killings. The result is one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, with about 7 million people displaced, many of them beyond the reach of aid.

"It's really heartbreaking (and) what I saw is truly a horrible situation," Ramesh Rajasingham, director of coordination in the UN humanitarian office, told The Associated Press. Rajasingham visited the city of Goma, where many are taking refuge. "Such a large number of displaced persons in such a short time is unprecedented," he said.

Congo has long been overrun by more than 120 armed groups seeking a share of the region's gold and other resources *PHOTO: EPA*

- The report highlights that Congo has been overrun by armed groups and as a result the country is facing one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, with about 7 million people displaced, many of them beyond the reach of aid

Amid intensified fighting with security forces, the M23 rebel group — the most dominant in the region with alleged links to neighbouring Rwanda — has continued to attack villages, forcing many to flee to Goma, the region's largest city whose estimated population of 2 million people is already overstretched with inadequate resources.

While M23 has said it is targeting security forces and not civilians, it has laid siege to several communities, with about half of North Kivu province under its control, according to Richard Moncrieff, the Crisis Group's Great Lakes region director, leaving many trapped and out of the reach of humanitarian aid.

"We fled insecurity, but here too, we live in constant fear," Chance Wabiwa, 20, said in Goma where she is taking refuge. "Finding a peaceful place has become a utopia for us. Perhaps we will never have it again," said Wabiwa. *—PTI*

Govt approves ₹1.3K cr for 295 road projects

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Road Ministry has sanctioned Rs 1,385.60 crore for the enhancement and reinforcement of 295 road development projects, spanning a total length of 2,055.62 km across Karnataka. According to an official statement, this endeavour not only aims to upgrade infrastructure but also promises to ameliorate connectivity, thereby fostering socio-economic development.As per another statement, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) has also sanctioned Rs 850 crore for the widening and strengthening of 31 state road projects, encompassing a total length of 435.29 Km in Telangana. *—PTI*

Kalpataru Projects bag arms order worth Rs 2,445 cr

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Kalpataru Projects International and its arms have bagged orders worth Rs 2,445 crore. The new orders include orders in the Transmission & Distribution (T&D) business of Rs 2,366 crores in India and overseas markets.Besides, it also got a Buildings & Factories (B&F) business project of Rs 79 crore.Kalpataru Projects International Ltd (KPIL) and its international subsidiaries have secured new orders/notification of awards of Rs 2,445 crores. KPIL is one of the largest specialised EPC (Engineering Procurement Construction) companies engaged in power transmission & distribution, buildings & factories, water supply & irrigation, railways, oil & gas pipelines, urban mobility (flyovers & metro rail), highways, and airports. It is currently executing projects in over 30 countries and has a presence in over 70 countries. *—PTI*

Tata Technologies appoints Sukanya Sadasivan as COO

PUNE, 14 MACH

Global engineering and digital services company Tata Technologies on Thursday announced the appointment of SukanyaSadasivan as its new Chief Operating Officer (COO), who will focus on strengthening delivery, practice and internal digital and IT systems.With over three decades at Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) in various roles, COO Sadasivan brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to Tata Technologies, the company said in a statement.She will report to Warren Harris, CEO and Managing Director, and the global delivery, practice organisation and digital information office teams will report to her.As COO, Sadasivan will work with the delivery heads to charter the next phase of growth, enhance engagement margins and strengthen the company's people supply chain in collaboration with HR and the resource management group.*—PTI*

Maharashtra buys Air India building for ₹1,601 cr

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Maharashtra government has become the owner of iconic Air India building with the Union government approving transfer of the asset on Thursday.AI Assets Holding Company Ltd (AIAHL), a Government of India company under administrative control of Ministry of Civil Aviation, was set up in 2019 for holding non-core assets and debt of Air India. The non-core assets of Air India, including land and building, valued at Rs 14,718 crore was transferred to AIAHL after it was set up by the government as a precursor to the sale of Air India for holding the debt and non-core assets of the then national carrier. The government had on 27 January, 2022, transferred ownership in Air India to the Tata Group which had in October 2021, put in aRs 18,000 crore bid for buying Air India. Constructed in 1974 on a land owned by the state government, the building will now be used by it as its office. *—PTI*

Fitch raises India's GDP forecast for next fiscal to 7%

For world, Fitch has raised its 2024 GDP forecast by 0.3 per cent

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Fitch said the country's economic growth continued to outperform quarterly forecasts ***PHOTO: PTI***

- Fitch Ratings on Thursday raised its forecast for India's economic growth to 7 per cent for the next fiscal year starting 1 April on the back of strong domestic demand and sustained level of business and consumer confidence.

Fitch Ratings on Thursday raised its forecast for India's economic growth to 7 per cent for the next fiscal year starting 1 April on the back of strong domestic demand and sustained level of business and consumer confidence.

With a stronger-than-expected 8.4 per cent growth in gross domestic product (GDP) during the third quarter (October-December) of the current fiscal year, Fitch saw the economy expanding 7.8 per cent in 2023-24 financial year, marginally higher than the government's estimate of 7.6 per cent.

In its latest 'Global Economic Outlook', the rating agency said the country's economic growth continued to outperform quarterly forecasts with domestic demand (investment growth increased 10.6 per cent year-on-year while private consumption was 3.5 per cent higher).

For the world, Fitch Ratings has raised its 2024 global GDP growth forecast by 0.3 percentage points to 2.4 per cent, as near-term world growth prospects have improved.

This on back of a sharp upward revision to its US forecast to 2.1 per cent, from 1.2 per cent in the December 2023 Global Economic Outlook (GEO).

"Stronger US growth prospects outweigh a marginal cut to our China 2024 growth forecast -- to 4.5 per cent from 4.6 per cent -- and a minor revision to our eurozone forecast, to 0.6 per cent from 0.7 per cent," it said.

"Growth in emerging markets, excluding China, has been revised up by 0.1 percentage point to 3.2 per cent, with forecasts raised for India, Russia and Brazil."

It expected world growth in 2025 to edge up to 2.5 per cent as the eurozone finally recovers -- on a pick-up in real wages and consumption -- but as US growth slows.

For India, Fitch Ratings said, "With GDP growth having exceeded 8 per cent for three consecutive quarters, we expect an easing in growth momentum in the final quarter of the current fiscal year, implying an estimate of 7.8 per cent for growth in FY24."

Recent quarterly data has shown that GDP is rising much faster than gross value-added -- indirect taxes net of subsidies is the difference between the two -- and this unusually wide gap may normalise.

Strong business survey data for January and February represents an upside risk to these estimates, it said.

Its forecasts imply that growth in the short term will outpace the economy's estimated potential, and that the pace of growth of activity will then moderate towards trend in FY25, with real GDP rising 6.5 per cent. *—PTI*

Markets rebound on buying in IT stocks

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

- The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 335.39 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 73,097.28. During the day, it jumped 602.41 points or 0.82 per cent to 73,364.30.

Benchmark Sensex rebounded 335 points and Nifty closed above the 22,100 level on Thursday on the back of buying in IT shares and metal shares as broader markets recovered from previous day's sharp losses.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 335.39 points or 0.46 per cent to settle at 73,097.28. During the day, it jumped 602.41 points or 0.82 per cent to 73,364.30.

The NSE Nifty gained 148.95 points or 0.68 per cent to 22,146.65.

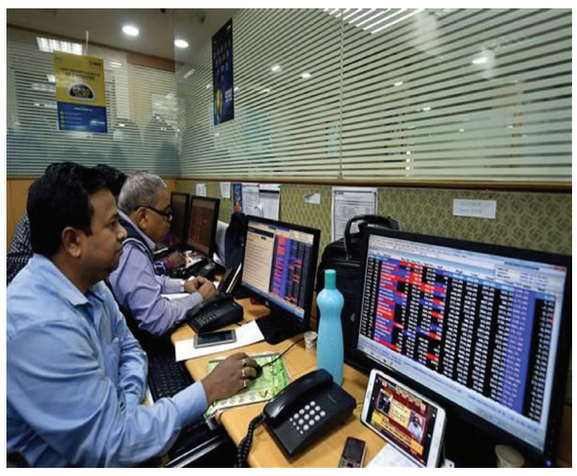
From the Sensex pack, HCL Technologies, Infosys, Wipro, BhartiAirtel, Larsen & Toubro, Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Consultancy Services and Asian Paints were the major gainers.

Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, JSW Steel, State Bank of India and Tata Steel were among the major laggards.

The broader markets also staged a smart recovery, with the BSE Smallcap gauge jumping 3.11 per cent and midcap index climbing 2.28 per cent.

The BSE benchmark index tanked 906.07 points, or 1.23 per cent, to settle at 72,761.89 on Wednesday. The Nifty plummeted 338 points, or 1.51 per cent, to 21,997.70.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.76 per cent to USD 84.67 a barrel. *—PTI*



Axis Bank, IndusInd Bank, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India and Tata Steel were among the major laggards ***PHOTO: PTI***

Gold rises Rs 250; silver jumps Rs 1,700 per kg

Gold prices rose Rs 250 to Rs 66,200 per 10g in the national capital on Thursday amid a rally in precious metal prices in the global markets, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal had settled at Rs 65,950 per 10g in the previous close. Silver also surged Rs 1,700 to Rs 77,000 per kg. In the previous trade, it had ended at Rs 75,300 per kg. In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,169 per ounce, up by USD 9 from the previous close. Gold prices recovered from a recent low and moved higher during the European trading session on Thursday due to a pullback in the US dollar and safe-haven buying, Gandhi added. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

RUPEE FALLS 1 PAISA TO END AT 82.82 AGAINST US DOLLAR

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

The rupee depreciated 1 paisa to settle at 82.82 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday amid a strong greenback against major rivals overseas and rising crude oil prices.

However, a firm trend in domestic equity markets supported the local currency and restricted the fall, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened slightly weak at 82.84 and witnessed an intra-day low of 82.89 and a high of 82.82 against the greenback during the session. The local unit finally settled at 82.82 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a loss of just 1 paisa from its previous close. *—PTI*

In its stock exchange filing, Reliance Industries said Viacom18 is a material subsidiary of TV18 Broadcast Ltd ***PHOTO: PTI***

Reliance to buy Paramount's 13% stake for Rs 4K cr

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Paramount Global has agreed to sell its 13 per cent stake in its Indian TV business to Reliance Industries for Rs 4,286 crore, the Indian firm said on Thursday.

In a stock exchange filing, Reliance said it has signed a binding agreement with two subsidiaries of Paramount Global to acquire 13.01 per cent equity stake of Viacom 18 Media Private Limited held by Paramount Global.

In its stock exchange filing, Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) said Viacom18 is a material subsidiary of TV18 Broadcast Ltd. The company currently holds compulsorily convertible preference shares of Viacom18 representing 57.48 per cent equity stake on a fully diluted basis.

Post the completion of this transaction, the company's equity stake in Viacom18 will increase to 70.49 per cent on a fully diluted basis.

Earlier in February, Walt Disney Co and Reliance Industries had announced the signing of binding pacts to merge their media operations in India to create aRs 70,000 crore behemoth. Under the deal, that came just over a month after the failed USD 10 billion merger of rivals Zee and Sony, Reliance and its affiliates will hold 63.16 per cent in the combined entity that will house two streaming services and 120 television channels.

Disney will hold the remaining 36.84 per cent, the companies had said.

As part of the transaction, the media undertaking of Viacom18 would be merged into Star India Pvt Ltd (SIPL) through a court-approved scheme of arrangement.

Reliance had also agreed to invest at closing Rs 11,500 crore into the joint venture to give it the muscle to fight rivals such as Japan's Sony and Netflix. The combined entity will have the largest OTT subscriber base. *—PTI*

Reliance shares climb over 1%

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Reliance Industries' stock climbed over 1 per cent on Thursday morning following news that Paramount Global has agreed to sell its 13 per cent stake Rs 4,286 crore.Shares of the country's most valued firm jumped 1.13 per cent to Rs 2,897.35 on the BSE.At the NSE, the stock climbed 1.14 per cent to Rs 2,897.05. *—PTI*

Qualcomm to set up 6G & 100 5G labs

CHENNAI, 14 MARCH

Qualcomm, the largest maker of smartphone processors and the Centre have agreed for a partnership to create a roadmap for developing industrial, automobile, telecom electronics, Union Minister AshwiniVaishnaw said here on Thursday.

The Union Minister of Railways, Communications and Electronics and Information Technology said the US-based Qualcomm also agreed to set up 6G labs, in line with the 100 5G labs, that have been established in the country in association with the Centre and state governments.

Vaishnaw inaugurated the Chennai Design Centre of Qualcomm, Inc which has been set up at an investment of Rs 177.27 crore. The facility, located on the famous Old Mahabalipuram Road popularly known as the Information Technology Corridor, would specialise in wireless connectivity solutions with a focus on innovations that complement Wi-Fi technologies.

The investment made at the Design Centre would open new doors for semiconductor design in alignment with the 'Make in India' campaign and would unlock growth opportunities for a strong indigenous design ecosystem.

On Wednesday, Prime Minister NarendraModi laid the foundation stone for three semiconductor . "We also agreed that like the 100 5G laboratories that were set up in the country, on the same scale we will set up 6G labs in our country," he said. *—PTI*

L&T wins gas pipeline project in Middle East

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

The Hydrocarbon vertical (L&T Energy Hydrocarbon - LTEH) of Larsen & Toubro (L&T) has recently secured a major onshore gas pipeline project from a prestigious client in the Middle East. According to the company's classification, the project is valued at Rs 5,000 crore to Rs 10,000 crore.

The scope of work comprises engineering, procurement, and construction of two new 56" Pipelines along with associated scraper receivers and launchers and main line isolation valve (MLIV) Stations running parallel to the existing pipeline corridor.

Organised under Offshore, Onshore EPC, Modular Fabrication, Advanced Value Engineering & Technology (AdVENT), and Offshore Wind Farm Business Groups, LTEH offers integrated design-to-build solutions across the hydrocarbon sector to domestic and international customers. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

GTRI SUGGESTS CHANGES IN GOVT'S AI ADVISORY

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

The government's advisory on artificial intelligence (AI) needs certain modifications such as a clear definition of "significant platforms", focus on applications with higher risks of spreading misinformation, and a transparent approval process, for the growth of AI technologies in India, a report said on Thursday.

Days after Google's AI platform's response to queries on Prime Minister NarendraModi generated controversy, the government earlier this month issued an advisory for social media and other platforms to label undertrial AI models and prevent unlawful content. *—PTI*

SpiceJet finalises lease agreements for 10 aircrafts

GURUGRAM, 14 MARCH

SpiceJet has finalised a lease agreement for 10 aircraft as part of its efforts to augment capacity, the airline said on Thursday. It added the move is aimed at providing seamless connectivity and enhanced services to passengers during the peak travel seasons.

Currently, SpiceJet has more than 30 planes in its fleet.

This comes nearly a month after SpiceJet received in-principle approval from the BSE to raise Rs2,242 crore by issuing shares and warrants convertible into equities on a preferential basis.

"These settlements with key aircraft lessors have also resulted in savings of Rs685 crore for the airline," he said.

After receiving the fund infusion in January this year, the company had stated that a significant portion of it would be used towards the airline's growth, expanding its network, bringing grounded planes back into operation, and positioning SpiceJet as a more resilient and competitive player in the aviation industry.

On 7 March, SpiceJet announced the successful resolution of aRs.413 croredispute with Echelon Ireland Madison One Ltd. The settlement resulted in savings of $48 million (Rs.398 crore) for SpiceJet and the acquisition of two airframes.

The airline also resolved an Rs 93 croredispute with aircraft leasing firm Cross Ocean Partners, resulting in the transfer of an airframe and an engine to the airline. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Wholesale inflation dips to 0.2% in Feb

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Wholesale inflation rate declined marginally to 0.2 per cent in February compared to 0.27 per cent in the preceding month despite a slight uptick in the food basket.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was in the negative zone from April to October and had turned positive in November at 0.26 per cent. The inflation in February 2023 was 3.85 per cent.

Food inflation moved up marginally to 6.95 per cent in February from 6.85 per cent in January, data showed.

Inflation in vegetables was 19.78 per cent, up from 19.71 in January.

The WPI inflation in pulses was at 18.48 per cent in February compared to 16.06 in January.

The data showed that inflation in the "fuel and power" segment contracted further by 1.59 per cent in February against a deflation of 0.51 per cent in January.

The prices of manufactured products, too, declined 1.27 per cent compared to 1.13 per cent in January.

While WPI is a key macro data suggesting the price producers get in the wholesale market, the inflation measured by movement in Consumer Price Index (CPI) reflects retail prices and forms the basis for the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) monetary policy actions.

Earlier in the week, the government had released CPI data, which showed that retail inflation in February stood at 5.09 per cent and remained within the RBI's comfort zone of 6 per cent for the sixth month in a row.

The February, WPI print, too, was almost unchanged compared to the January number of 5.1 per cent, though the data showed prices of certain items in the food basket had firmed up. *—PTI*

Food inflation moved up marginally to 6.95 per cent in February ***PHOTO: X***

FOR GLOBAL MARKETS

India to create 24M tech-savvy manpower: Foundit CEO

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

India is set to create 24 million tech-savvy skilled manpower for the global market in the next 3-5 years, according to Sekhar Garisa, CEO of Bengaluru-based Foundit, a job placement platform.

Foundit is already working with 90 million registered jobseekers, 70 per cent, or 63 million, of whom are from Indian technology institutes, he said at the launch of the next-generation recruitment solution app in Singapore on Wednesday evening.

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"Currently, 60 per cent of our job arrangements are in India, followed by 35 per cent in Southeast Asian countries and 5 per cent in the Middle East," he said.

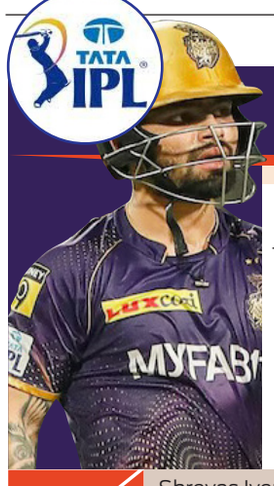
Over the next 3-5 years, the target is to create a database of 600 million skilled people from global talent hunt, 80 million of which will be from India, including the current 56 million or so, he estimated.

Sekhar Garisa ***PHOTO: X***

Formerly known as Monster, Foundit was rebranded in 2022 with a focus on Asia Pacific and the Middle East.

Garisa underscored the challenge of matching jobs and skilled people though tech-driven platforms are effectively collating data from online networks, and conceded that finding the right person for the right job at the right location is a challenge, given the skill shortage worldwide.

With the advent of new technological innovation, Foundit has collaborated with 100 companies in India over the past few months, resulting in an 80 per cent boost in recruiter productivity. *—PTI*



KNOW THE TEAMS

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

The team boasts of a mix of seasoned players and is expected to make a good comeback. Batters and bowlers dominating the team improve the chances of winning

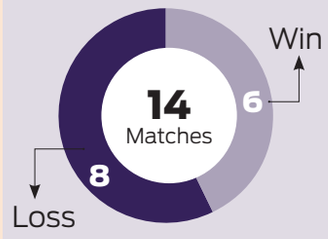
RINKU SINGH
Key Batsman

59.25	67	14
Avg (Average)	HS (Highest Score)	Innings (Innings)
149.52	31	29
SR (Strike Rate)	4s (Fours)	6s (sixes)

STRENGTHS

KKR's batting unit is backed by match-winning names such as Jason Roy, Shreyas Iyer and Russell. Iyer's comeback might bring positive results to KKR

2023 IPL RECORDS



WEAKNESS

Injuries or poor form can cost KKR. The team relies heavily on Mitchell Starc, the most expensive in the league at Rs 24.75 crore

VARUN CHAKARAVARTHY
Key Bowler

14	20	8.14
Innings (Innings)	Wkts (Wickets)	Eco (Economy)
15/4	1	
BBI – Best Bowling in innings (Runs/ Wickets)	4W (Wickets)	

SQUAD

Shreyas Iyer(C), Nitish Rana, Jason Roy, Rinku Singh, Manish Pandey, Angkrish Raghuvanshi, Sherfane Rutherford, Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Srikar Bharat, Harshit Rana, Suyash Sharma, Vaibhav Arora, Varun Chakravarthy, Chetan Sakariya, Mitchell Starc, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Gus Atkinson, Sakib Hussain, Andre Russell, Anukul Roy, Sunil Narine, Venkatesh Iyer, Ramandeep Singh

SCHEDULE

23 March vs SRH	29 March vs RCB	3 April vs DC
Kolkata	Bengaluru	Visakhapatnam

Mumbai win record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title

Beating Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day in a summit clash

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

Domestic heavyweights Mumbai ended their eight-year barren run to lift a record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title on Thursday, beating a resolute Vidarbha by 169 runs on the fifth and final day of a thoroughly engrossing summit clash.

The fate of the final Mumbai's 48th in the 90 years of the tournament's history here at the iconic Wankhede Stadium was sealed when the hosts set a 538-run target for the visiting team.

Vidarbha captain Akshay Wadkar (102) and the unheralded Harsh Dubey (65) kept Mumbai at bay for the entire first session after Vidarbha resumed on 248 for five, needing another 290 runs to win. The team was eventually bowled out for 368.

In a contest that ebbed and flowed, Mumbai came out as the winners after Vidarbha frustrated them for long periods of play in the last two days.

Wadkar not only led the fight for his side with his first century of the year but also crossed the 600-run mark this season. Dubey brought up only his second fifty of the first-class career.

Together, they forged the longest stand of the innings, consuming 255 balls in 194 minutes from day four until a little after the resumption of the second session on the final day.

Wadkar fell shortly after play resumed -- leg before off Tanush Kotian (4/95) -- and once the pair was broken, it all ended in a jiffy for the visitors who have now lost the Ranji Trophy final on the third instance after winning two titles.

Tushar Deshpande continued to employ the short ball to dismiss Dubey (65 off 128 balls, 5 x4s, 2x6s) and Aditya Sarwate, who missed the majority of the game owing to a back spasm.

While Kotian cleaned up Yash Thakur (6) for his fourth wicket, Dhawal Kulkarni signed off from all forms of cricket with the final wicket of the game in the form of Umesh Yadav for a fairytale ending.

Brief scores:
Mumbai: 224 & 418
Vidarbha: 105 & 368 in 134.4 overs (Atharva Taide 32, Aman Mokhade 32, Karun Nair 74, Akshay Wadkar 102; Tanush Kotian 4/95) by 169 runs.

—PTI

Mumbai players celebrate with the championship trophy after winning the Ranji Trophy final test cricket match between Mumbai and Vidarbha, at the Wankhede Stadium, in Mumbai on Thursday PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai Indians will take on RCB PHOTO: PTI

Defending champions MI eye another final

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

Defending champions Mumbai Indians will look to their captain Kaur for inspiration when they take on a plucky Royal Challengers Bangalore in the Women's Premier League Eliminator here on Friday. Mumbai heads to the match on the back of five wins and three losses including the seven-wicket loss RCB inflicted on them earlier this week. However, the holders are counting it as a rare off day.

"I have seen consistency. If we make an exception for the last match, all the other games that we won. Yes. the performance was not good in the last match, but that's okay.

"We are prepared for the next game. And this happened before the Eliminators so we are taking this as a good sign," MI batting coach Devika Palshikaar said on the eve of the game.Last year, UP Warriorz dented MI's playoff chances by defeating them in the league stage. Harmanpreet and Co then went on to win a one-sided Eliminator before claiming the title.MI enjoys a 3-1 head-to-head against RCB. The winner of the clash will take on Delhi Capitals in the final on Sunday.The match starts at 7:30 pm IST.

—PTI

RCB kick-starts pre-tournament camp

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

Royal Challengers Bangalore began their pre-tournament campwithout their numero uno Virat Kohli, who might take a few more days to joinbefore the team starts its IPL campaign against reigning champions ChennaiSuper Kings on March 22.Most of thedomestic players joined the camp under the guidance of new head coach AndyFlower and Director of Cricket Mo Bobat and they went through the paces on theopening day of the camp on Wednesday.While skipper-Faf du Plessis was in attendance along with West Indies fast bowler AlzarriJoseph, Kohli, easily the biggest 'Box Office' in Indian cricket, is yet to hit-the straps after a paternity break that ruled him out of the marquee five-Test-series against England.

—PTI

PHOTO: PTI

Domestic umpiring standards under scanner

BENGALURU, 14 MARCH

The dubious dismissal of Karnataka opener Prakhar Chaturvedi in the recent Col. CK Nayudu Trophy U23 final against Uttar Pradesh has raised concerns about the standards of umpiring in domestic matches.The unsavory incident happened in Karnataka's first innings after Chaturvedi played a pull against UP pacer Kunal Tyagi well away from his body.The ball, which took a rather healthy edge off Chaturvedi's bat, moved further away from stumper Aaradhya Yadav who had to make a full-length dive to his left to make the collection.But the ball rolled out of Yadav's gloves before he could complete the catch even as the wicketkeeper thudded onto the ground.—PTI

PHOTO: AFP

Bournemouth win 4-3 against Luton in a thrilling comeback

BOURNEMOUTH, 14 MARCH

Bournemouth completed a stunning comeback to beat Luton 4-3 in the Premier League on Wednesday after being 3-0 down at halftime. Antoine Semenyo's 83rd-minute strike at Vitality Stadium sealed the win for Bournemouth and prevented Luton from climbing out of the relegation zone.Bournemouth is the third team in Premier League history to come back from 3-0 down at halftime and win. Manchester United and Wolverhampton were the other two teams to achieve that feat."I haven't been involved in a game like that before," Semenyo said.—AP

Flash targets for Para Shooting World Cup trap finals create controversy

NEW DELHI, 14 MARCH

India faced a huge embarrassment in front of the international shooting community when the 'flash targets' for the finals of the prestigious WSPS Para World Cup trap events had to be discarded by the foreign jury as they were not fit for competition. The 'flash target', when hit by lead splinters of a 12-bore cartridge fired by the competitor, explodes on impact, spewing a thick plume of pink color into the atmosphere. The WSPS Para Shooting World Cup is the first-ever event of its kind taking place in India and offers 20 Paris Paralympic berths.More than 250 shooters from 50 countries participated in theevent, which concluded on Thursday, at the Karni Singh Ranges.While 'flash targets' are not mandatory in the finals of the shotgun events.

—PTI

Ajinkya Rahane hails BCCI for promoting domestic cricket

MUMBAI, 14 MARCH

Old guard Ajinkya Rahane understands the significance of religiously turning up for domestic matches to become a battle-hardened cricketer. So it came as no surprise when the batter Thursday lauded the BCCI for pushing players towards excelling in red-ball cricket.

The BCCI has been actively urging the senior cricketers towards playing red-ball cricket, including domestic competitions such as the Ranji Trophy.

"I want to mention BCCI for giving importance to domestic cricket, which is a very good thing. Allowing players to go and play domestic cricket is very important," Rahane said after guiding Mumbai to a record-extending 42nd Ranji Trophy title.

Old guard Ajinkya Rahane PHOTO: PTI

The board had recently dropped middle-order batter Shreyas Iyer and wicketkeeper-batter Ishan Kishan from the central contracts list for not taking the Indian team management's advice to play Ranji Trophy to regain their form and prove their fitness.

Speaking about the triumph, Rahane said Mumbai must look to repeat this performance in the next season.

Mumbai won the premier domestic competition for the first time since 2015-16, defeating Vidarbha by 169 runs in the final here at the Wankhede Stadium.

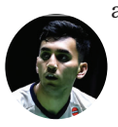
In fact, for the Ranji Trophy behemoths, it was their 11th win in 13 finals alone at the Wankhede.

"For us, what is important is that (in the) last couple of years, as a team we are playing good cricket. Our players are going into the Indian team and representing the Indian team which is a very good sign for Mumbai cricket again," Rahane told the media after leading his team to title triumph.

—PTI

Lakshya enters q/fs, erratic Sindhu loses

BIRMINGHAM, 14 MARCH



India's Lakshya Sen recorded a stunning three-game win over world no. 3 Anders Antonsen to progress to the quarterfinals but an error- prone PV Sindhu lost in the women's singles second round of the All England Championships here on Thursday.

The World No. 18 Sen, who had finished runner-up at the 2022 edition, fought his way back from a 2-8 deficit in the decider after losing the second game to prevail 24-22 11-21 21-14 over Antonsen, a three-time medallist at the World championships, in a controversial second round match.

Earlier Sindhu, a double Olympic medallist, seemed to be in good touch as she fought hard against the world No. 1 An Se Young of Korea but failed to curb her mistakes to slip to a 19-21, 11-21 loss.

—AP

Aryna sent packing at Indian Wells; Medvedev, Gauff advance

INDIAN WELLS, 14 MARCH

American Emma Navarro shocked Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka to reach the Indian Wells ATP-WTA Masters quarter-finals on Wednesday as Coco Gauff sailed through.

Navarro, ranked 23rd in the world, pushed Sabalenka hard on a breezy Stadium Court to notch her first career win over a top-five player 6-3, 3-6, 6-2.

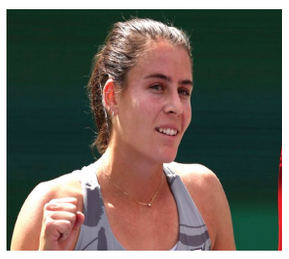
US Open champion Gauff, seeded third, celebrated her 20th birthday with a dominant 6-0, 6-2 victory over Belgian Elise Mertens.

It wasn't quite so easy for last year's men's runner-up Daniil Medvedev, but the fourth-seeded Russian managed the windy conditions to post a 6-4, 6-4 triumph over Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov. Medvedev next faced seventh-seeded Holger Rune, who saved a match point and then roared through the second-set tiebreaker on the way to a 2-6, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3 victory over 2022 champion Taylor Fritz. "It was a crazy match," Rune said. I managed to raise my level at the end of the second set. I just kept believing. I was always behind in the match, I was struggling to break his serve, but once I found my rhythm ... especially the tiebreak was very good for me and then I just gained confidence."

Medvedev said consistency was the key to his victory in windy conditions.

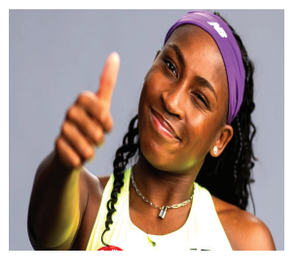
"I think in general I played well. I was consistent," said Medvedev, who had just 13 unforced errors as he moved a step closer to a first title at Indian Wells — the only hardcourt ATP Masters tournament he has never won. In other men's matches, American Tommy Paul ended Italian Luca Nardi's dream week with a 6-4, 6-3 victory. Nardi, who lost in qualifying but gained a place in the main draw as a "lucky loser" thanks to a withdrawal, was coming off a stunning upset of world number one Novak Djokovic in the third round.

—AP



Emma Navarro PHOTO: AFP

Medvedev PHOTO: AFP



Coco Gauff PHOTO: AFP

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Atletico beats Inter on penalties to reach quarterfinals

MADRID, 14 MARCH

With tears in his eyes, Diego Simeone stared at the Atletico Madrid fans celebrating in the Metropolitano Stadium stands. Minutes earlier, the coach was pacing back and forth by the sideline, unable to watch the tense penalty shootout that ended with Atletico triumphing over Inter Milan and advancing to the quarterfinals of the Champions League.

Jan Oblak made two saves and Lautaro Martínez sent his shot over the crossbar as Atletico defeated Inter 3-2 on penalties after scoring a late winner in regulation on Wednesday.

"It was moving," Simeone said. "I'm happy for the players and for the fans. We are among the best eight teams in Europe again. That tells a lot about this club."

Oblak saved the penalties by Alexis Sánchez and Davy Klaassen before Martínez missed the final kick for last year's runner-up in the European competition.

"In the end, it's a bit about luck in the shootout," Oblak said. "Because you have to choose the correct side and you have to make the stop. If the player takes the kick perfectly, it's impossible to stop it. Gladly, I was able to make the saves. What matters is the victory and that we made it to the quarterfinals."

Atletico Madrid players celebrate winning against Inter Milan PHOTO: AFP

Jadon Sancho Helps Borussia Dortmund Past PSV

A third-minute goal from Jadon Sancho and Marco Reus' late strike sent Borussia Dortmund through to the Champions League last eight with a 2-0 win on Wednesday, sealing a 3-1 aggregate victory.

Dortmund's Jadon Sancho, right, duels for the ball with PSV's Jerdy Schouten during the Champions League round of 16 second-leg soccer PHOTO: AFP

Level at 1-1 after the last-16 first leg in the Netherlands, Sancho wasted no time in putting Dortmund ahead at the Westfalenstadion with a low shot from outside the area — his first Champions League goal since November 2021. Dortmund were shaky despite the early lead and needed a fair share of luck and some poor PSV finishing to progress, with Hirving Lozano's 53rd-minute effort hitting the post. PSV pushed forwards in stoppage time looking for an equaliser but instead gave away another goal.

—AP